

I Was a Bottom-Tier Bureaucrat for 1,500 years, and the Demon

**Kisetsu Morita
Benio**

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM



I've Been
Killing Slimes for
300 Years
and **MAXED**
Out My Level
SPIN-OFF

Kisetsu Morita

Illustration by **Benio**

Public Service
× 1,500 Years
+ Pecora's Magic
Minister of
Agriculture

I Was a **Bottom-Tier** 
Bureaucrat  for **1,500 Years**,
and the **Demon King** Made Me a Minister

I Was a **Bottom-Tier**
Bureaucrat for 2500 Years,
and the **Demon King** Made Me a Minister
Kisetsu Morita Illustration by Benio

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I shall
do as
you say,
Elder
Sister...
♡

Get
some
rest
now,
Pecora.

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Story by Kisetsu Morita Illustration by Benio

I Was a Bottom-Tier Bureaucrat for 1,500 Years, and the Demon King Made Me a Minister

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★ I was a Bottom-Tier Bureaucrat for 1500 years,
and the Demon King Made Me a Minister ★



Kisetsu Morila
Illustration by Benio

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ON
NEW YORK

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I Was a Bottom-Tier Bureaucrat for 1,500 years, and the Demon King Made Me a Minister, Vol. 1

KISETSU MORITA

Translation by Jasmine Bernhardt and Sarah Neufeld

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SLIME TAOSHITE SANBYAKUNEN, SHIRANAIUCHINI LEVEL MAX NI NATTEMASHITA SPIN-OFF HIRAYAKUNIN YATTE SENGOHYAKUNEN, MAO NO CHIKARADE DALJIN NI SARECHAIMASHITA

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Yen Newsletter

★ I was a Bottom-Tier Bureaucrat for 1500 years, ★
★ and the Demon King Made Me a Minister ★





MY
NAME IS
BEELZE-
BUB,
AGRICUL-
TURAL
MINISTER
OF THE
DEMON
REALM!

BEELZEBUB

Main character.

A lowly, plain pencil pusher in the demon realm who lived a comfortable, lazy life...until she caught the eye of the demon king.

Shenanigans ensued.

PECORA

(PROVATO
PECORA ARIÉS)

The demon king.
A girl with a devilish temperament who loves to use her power and influence to bewilder her subordinates.



YOU AB-
SOLUTELY
MUST
THINK
MORE OF
YOURSELF
AS MY
ELDER
SISTER!



BOSS,
THERE
ARE
TIMES
WHEN A
DEMON
MUST
FIGHT.

VANIA

The younger
leviathan sister.

Right after
Beelzebub was
made minister,
she was assigned
to be her secretary
(and supervisor).
A klutz.

FATLA

The older
leviathan sister.

Right after
Beelzebub was
made minister,
she was assigned
to be her secretary
(and supervisor).
Levelheaded.



LADY
BEELZE-
BUB,
I AM
TRULY
GLAD
YOU ARE
OUR
MINISTER.



I Was Promoted from Bottom-Tier to Minister

My name is Beelzebub.

My name makes me sound important, but really, it's too important a name for me. It once belonged to a great demon of the past, and I was given that name, common as I am, so I may one day reach those same heights.

For the past 1,500 years, I've been quietly, plainly, and simply working as a public servant for the demon government.

The post I took was in the Agricultural Policy Organization, the lower branch of the Department of Agriculture.

To put it simply, it was the place that created projects and produced data for the country's agricultural administration. For 1,500 years, I was a clerk there—basically the lowest of the lowliest bureaucrats. You might believe my record was awful or that my attitude at work was terrible, but that wasn't true. I had stopped there intentionally.

Personnel prodded me, occasionally suggesting I become a manager at least, but I turned down every offer. I told them I didn't have those skills.

According to the rules governing public servants, if the person in question refuses a promotion, they are able to stay in their position. I could never be fired, because I was a government official!

I was going to live on lazily as a rank-and-file employee with no responsibilities!

Some people are suited for life in the fast lane, and some aren't. I was the latter. I didn't feel like summoning the drive to climb the bureaucratic ladder all the way to the top, nor did I feel like having a passionate affair.

It was far too much trouble, so I didn't have the confidence to establish a household, either.

And so I concentrated on working as the least important clerk—or, as they say, “the bottom tier.”

I didn't even have the caliber to stand before people, much less to stand above them. I knew that best of all.

I wore clothes that were a little uglier than average, and my hair was pulled back only because it'd grown out and was bothering me. And although my eyesight was perfectly fine, I wore glasses to make me stand out even less.

I was just someone in the office. I was never a topic of workplace gossip, and if I disappeared, very little would change. Of course, the men I worked with would never even consider me as an object of romantic interest.

I'd managed to preserve my lifestyle of living in the shadows, undetected, for 1,500 years. It was my way of protecting myself.

My only miscalculation was that my coworkers always casually came to ask me for help because I was so plain, but I just endured it as an inevitable hardship.

You see, the frightening and domineering ladies stuck in middle management would never ask for help from the female employees beneath them. And a man always hesitated when it came to asking things from a beautiful, unmarried coworker. Someone else might be suspicious that he was interested in her. In that respect, I had no relation to office politics, and I was outside the fight for success.

Not only that, but with my nonexistent fashion sense, I appeared to have thrown away my femininity entirely.

Both men and women alike saw me as androgynous and approached me without hesitation.

And as a result, I turned into the one people came to when they were in trouble.

On my right, I would have an employee who didn't know where the file room was, so I'd go with them to show them where it was; on my left, I would have someone frazzled by their boss's very peculiar style requirements for any documents submitted, so I'd use my 1,500 years of career experience to help them.

I usually just got a piece of candy as thanks. For bigger jobs, I'd often get a drink at the bar.

I mean, that was fine. I was totally okay with that, if the alternative was moving up in the ranks and being saddled with more responsibility.

And for that, I think I was pretty well-liked within the office.



My unrefined lifestyle would get even worse when I returned to my single apartment.

When I got home, I would immediately change into my roomy pajamas!

Then I'd lie on the floor!

And my shoes were dirty, so I'd take them off. "No shoes" was the rule in my house.

On the table would be empty bottles and cups of alcohol and nuts to snack on. The pile of books in the corner of my room was collapsing, but I hadn't put them back.

If a lady friend came, she'd retreat immediately, but honestly, I didn't have the courage to invite anyone here in the first place. I didn't even want to invite my family over.

But this tepid lifestyle suited me. My personality was perfect for these lazy, unchanging days.



I wasn't wrong. If I could live my long life with ease like this, I would consider it a victory. Perhaps one could call it my "win condition."

And wasn't it nice to just get drunk at home without anyone scolding you?

On the morning of my day off, the light streaming in through my run-down apartment woke me up. But—

"I stayed too long yesterday helping people. Maybe I should sleep a little more..."

That morning I fell back asleep, then finally woke up for real with bed head.

"What shall I do today? First I'll go to the restaurant with spicy hell pasta for brunch."

That place offered large portions and allowed us to add extra spice for free during lunchtime.

"Then I'll pick something out from the bookstore—it looks like it's going to rain tonight, so I'll come back early, and I can just have the hell-pot and bread I made yesterday... I suppose I'm fine as long as I'm eating spicy food."

Savoring the little things was a good way to live, in my opinion.

Sometimes I felt like the little things were too little, but big dreams would only leave me exhausted.

I was born as a daughter to greengrocers and spent some time helping with the store, and after I reached a suitable age for a long-lived demon, I took a test and became a civil servant. I was indifferent to the promotion ladder at that point. To be honest, I lacked any interest in moving up in the world, or in becoming important.

I yawned as I milled about Vanzeld Castle town.

As I walked along a market road, I saw a flyer:

CORONATION OF THE NEW DEMON KING ON THE XTH DAY OF THE XTH MONTH

Ah, indeed. It was finally time for the succession.

Now that the war with the humans had reached a cease-fire and the aftermath was mostly over, the demon king was apparently putting his daughter on the throne.

Her name is Provato Pecora Ariés, I believe.

I'd heard she was young and reform-oriented. Because of that, the people at the top of the organization were apprehensive that she might interfere with the status quo for the civil servants based on her whims.

When a new demon king was crowned, they often put the scalpel to the bureaucracy in order to freshen it up. The agricultural minister at the top of the department would probably change, but, well, that had nothing to do with me. I'd just go about my business quietly. There was no fight for power at the bottom. I didn't have any power to begin with.

I wolfed down my extra-large and extra-spicy pasta at my usual place.

A demon couple walked hand in hand in front of the bookstore. They were too lovey-dovey; they'd probably break up in six months. They should take more care so as not to deepen the inevitable wounds.

I sighed as I stored my warning away in my heart.

Some people out there just had brilliant lives.



And so coronation day for the new demon king came.

Us civil servants all attended to give praise to our new ruler up on the stage.

She *was* young. Far younger than I had imagined.

The new demon king had a pair of sheeplike horns growing from the sides of her head and wore a black dress for the ceremony. She struck me as a well-raised girl, but she looked so much like a child that I heard voices of concern around me.

I understood their opinion; things could prove difficult if the demon king wasn't an already battle-hardened individual, even if we weren't currently at war with the humans.

"I am the new demon king, Provato Pecora Ariés. I hope to work together with everyone to create an even better nation."

Her plain, generic general policy speech came to an end.

Still, if she could follow a template like that, she could at least keep the status quo. From the perspective of all the civil servants, that would be the most ideal—

And then.

The new demon king suddenly locked eyes with me.

I was standing way, way, way behind the agricultural minister, and yet it felt like she was looking directly at me. No, I had to be imagining things. The new demon king would never look at a low-level grunt like me. Our eyes had just happened to meet when she was scanning the audience.

"And now, I would like to announce each new cabinet minister~ I believe our new personnel will be more youthful than ever."

What she said was also something all too common.

The words meant she was breaking up the old ways, but it was normal to promote the powerful members of some faction somewhere.

If they had any interest, the minister would be selected from the same faction that supported the previous demon king, or possibly a different faction.

According to the rules, even someone of low standing could climb up to a higher position, but there was nothing but lip service to the idea. Every position at the top was and always had belonged to the privileged class. A noble title was necessary to be a minister, especially.

“First, our foreign minister shall be Nastas. Next, the home minister shall be Velts; the economic minister shall be Vector...”

She read names one after the other. It seemed the designated demons had no idea of this announcement beforehand, so a few of them made victorious poses upon hearing their name.

Everyone seemed strong. If the war with the humans were still in progress, then they’d probably be dispatched to towers here and there as bosses.

The new demon king offered simple explanations for why she selected these first few people as ministers.

I paid no attention to it as I thought about who came from what faction.

She was appointing ministers from all different factions. Maybe that meant the new demon king’s authority was weak.

“Now, I shall return to the personnel. The labor minister shall be Chanoir; the health minister shall be Mix...”

The rank-and-file workers weren’t interested at all. Many people around me started yawning. None of it affected us personally, after all.

“...The agricultural minister shall be Beelzebub...”

At first, I didn’t really understand what she said.

Actually, it might be more apt to say that I ignored it. This couldn’t have to do with me.

Beelzebub was the name of a great demon from the past, so it wouldn’t have been strange to hear of other civil servants with the same name. It was probably someone else, someone important in the agricultural department.

But all my coworkers standing in front of me turned around to look at me with blatant disbelief.

“Wait, can she do that?”

“How many ranks are you going up?”

Everyone was thinking I was going to be the agricultural minister...

“Wait, wait! This has to be a mistake! I’ve always been at the bottom; I can’t be the minister!” I cried with conviction.

Such a personnel shift was unthinkable!

But the new demon king continued with her explanation.

“Beelzebub has worked dependably for one thousand, five hundred years in agricultural policy. She has also helped many of her coworkers and is extraordinarily popular. In the past, we received many comments in the suggestion box requesting she be placed in an important post. And yet, she herself never boasted about it, working for years as an unsung hero. I believe the time has finally come to raise her into a position of authority.”

The new demon king replied with a lengthy and unbelievable explanation. Perhaps she was just trying to catch everyone by surprise with a sensational cabinet selection because she was young, but I wouldn’t be part of this!

Once I took on the position of minister, a colossal amount of work would be waiting for me. I certainly wouldn’t be able to continue the easy life I had now. My humble delights would crumble to dust...

I would not stand for this.

I leaped out of my row.

“I am Beelzebub! Your Majesty, I don’t think this assignment will be possible!”

It was a rude thing to do to the demon king, but desperate times called for desperate measures, and no one was coming to stop me.

The new demon king looked down at me playfully from the stage. I could see on her face that she had predicted this very reaction.

Which meant I hadn’t been imagining it when I thought our eyes met...

“It seems you are not satisfied with the situation,” the new demon king said to me, blatantly ignoring our difference in status.

I wanted to applaud her for her frank tone, but my promotion was what was at stake here.

“Of course I’m not! The minister’s post is for a person who is already important! Someone fourth or fifth in the pecking order may end up becoming a minister, but there’s no precedent for bottom-tier trash like me to take the position!”

I hadn’t been working for 1,500 years for show. I *knew* this was unprecedented.

“I see. What you say is correct. So I will answer your question.” It wasn’t like the new demon king was using any kind of voice-enhancing magic, but it still carried really well. “You’ve been serving for one thousand, five hundred years; is that correct?”

“Yes. I was originally helping out with my parents’ greengrocery, so I only took and passed the civil service exam after I turned one

thousand. And for the fifteen hundred years since then, I've been working where I am now."

I wondered why I had to give my life story in front of everyone, but if this was going to create a scandal and make it clear that I shouldn't be promoted that far up, then that was reasonable to me.

"So you've been working for the current public Agricultural Policy Organization for fifteen hundred years, Beelzebub. In that case, it should've been impossible for you to remain at an entry-level position this whole time. Yet there's no record of you having been promoted."

"I've turned down every offer of promotion because it would be beyond my abilities."

My job was just to complete the tasks that came down to me from the top, no thought required. I'd always be in a position for others to use me, but I wouldn't have to take on any heavy responsibility.

I could hear my colleagues: "Someone's been at the bottom for fifteen hundred years?" and "I guess that's not a post that comes with a fixed term."

It was true; the way I worked was not a common trick.

This might've been difficult to pull off if I were human, but demons were long-lived, and with my youthful looks, my low position wouldn't seem strange.

"Indeed, and so I've calculated to see what would've happened if you had been continually promoted with your grades. Please look at this."

A plan written on a large poster unfurled next to the new demon king—she must've had this ready beforehand.

"Taking into account your service record, service history, and reputation among your bosses and colleagues, you have accumulated results that prove there would be no problem if you became minister. Congratulations!"

"Wh-wh-wha...?"

I wanted to believe it was a dream and softly pinched my left arm.
Ow.

Around me, I could hear comments:



How far would
Beelzebub have gotten
if she were promoted?



“I see. Making a big jump after raising your reputation by working hard for a very long time on the bottom is one way to do it.”

“Maybe it’s like trying to become the strongest by only killing slimes.”

Wait, wait, wait—why are they okay with this...?

The new demon king placed her right hand against her right cheek and sighed theatrically.

“Sigh~ I also thought of a more orthodox personnel selection, but we discovered corruption as well as embezzlement from both the vice minister and employees in similar posts, so we asked them to resign~ I was truly lost as to who I should make the minister of agriculture~”

The new demon king eyed me again, chuckling softly.

Oh, so she’s a prankster...

This was just a big experiment using me, a low-ranking employee...

Give me a break! I don’t want to be your guinea pig!

“Then I thought that perhaps this was our chance to use someone who’d spent their career at the bottom and yet maintained an excellent reputation.”

After she said that, the other bureaucrats around me offered more comments.

“Ohhh, I get it now.”

“That’s one way of going about it.”

Why are you okay with this?!

Calm down; calm down. I’ll be doing just what the new demon king wants if I get worked up here.

I was still a civil servant, so I should calmly refuse the offer as was afforded in the rules.

“Your Majesty, in this instance, I would respectfully recommend that I remain a low-level employee.”

I bowed my head politely and folded my wings. They had spread in my excitement, and it’d be rude to keep them out.

“Oh, no. It’s normal to appoint people who’ve shown great achievements.”

“However, I’m the daughter of a humble greengrocer in the countryside. What I want to say is, I don’t have any noble status or any similar rank. It has been the long-standing practice that those of noble standing take the position of minister. I am completely undeserving of this post, and I am terribly sorry to say that I can’t accept it.”

Despite how quickly the bureaucratic organization had developed in the past two thousand years, there were still slight traces of a class system among the demons.

Depending on the era, minister-level demons would sometimes command their subordinates to carry out massive wars against the humans, so it required someone with a rank worthy of such responsibility.

“I see now. What a pickle~”

“Yes, so if you would kindly choose someone else to—”

“Then I will give you an empty manor belonging to a former noble family. And I will also give you a title. You may introduce yourself as Lady Beelzebub. Problem solved.”

“.....What?”

She decided on that far too easily...

Then the new demon king stepped down from the stage and, for some reason, started walking toward me.

The civil servants on either side of her naturally parted the way for her. I also courteously knelt before her.

“Beelzebub, this may seem unreasonable to you, but had you climbed up through the ranks normally, you would truly be a talent on par with the minister after working so hard for fifteen hundred years. The score that the personnel department gave you was unnaturally high. In reality, plenty of other posts requested you, but agricultural policy stopped them all.”

“Th-that’s because a clerk’s work is easy, so it probably just looked like I was working hard...”

“Raise your head, Beelzebub.”

I had to obey when she commanded me. There stood the new demon king, smiling with royal dignity.

She then plopped her hand on my shoulder.

“It was the previous demon king who settled the war with the humans. But there are a heap of problems yet, and the agricultural department is full of them. Right now, we require new forces without prior obligations tying them down. This is a request from me, Demon King Provato Pecora Ariés.”

The new demon king graciously bowed her head to me.

All my options for excuses were gone. I’d shame her if I turned her down now.

Not only would I not be able to keep my easy low-level job, I wouldn’t even be able to live in Vanzeld Castle town.

“I—I humbly accept the appointment...”

And so I, Beelzebub, suddenly went from entry-level clerk to the minister of agriculture.



I had to bid farewell to my run-down apartment and its proximity to

the market, which was really the only good thing about it. It was a sudden good-bye.

I was moving to a stout three-story building outside of the Vanzeld Castle moat. It reminded me of the main branch of a bank. The yard in front of the manor was even big enough to play sports on. There was a garden with a large pond in the back, and I'd heard that rocs sometime came to drink the water. Behind it was a whole forest, like a sea of trees.

When I stood before the building, I stared at it in blank amazement.

"If there was a coup tomorrow, I'd probably be one of the first to die..."

I checked every single one of the large, abundant rooms. One room was already bigger than my old apartment. There was even a ballroom.

I'd have to employ some kind of help in the future. Otherwise, I'd have to take off every day to clean if I wanted to keep up. Or I could just use the minimum amount of rooms needed for my day-to-day life...

Then I saw something in the enormous mirror in the changing room before the chalky-white bathroom.

I was terrified.

Standing there was a woman with no hope of getting ahead, with no prospects for entering society, with no money—with nothing, because she'd thrown it all away.

It wasn't a ghost, of course. Demons weren't scared of ghosts.

The only thing in the mirror was my own face.

Indeed—standing out wouldn't do anything for a low-level employee, so I'd had no qualms about it. I'd treated my appearance as a good way to keep as many people on my side as possible.

But now I was a noble and a minister.

Someone in those positions couldn't look this plain. I wouldn't be mistaken for a minister's secretary, much less a full-blown minister.

Even if the new demon king acknowledged me, that didn't mean the other ministers from real houses wouldn't snicker behind my back. And my staff would undeniably laugh at me, too...

I made up my mind.

It's time I change my character.

I placed as many gold and silver coins into a bag as I could fit and went out onto the main avenue.

I bought everything that caught my eye at a women's clothing shop and returned to the manor. Then I carefully tried on each item

before the mirror.

It would have been nice if I had had friends for a time like this, but I didn't have any. Seriously, zero.

In reality, after working at a low-level position for 1,500 years, I had watched all the people I'd joined with go to higher ranks, and there was no one in the workplace I got along well with. It was all my own doing.

Glasses didn't fit my character, so I took them off. I didn't have bad eyesight in the first place, so it was no problem.

I chose my outfit. It was a little revealing, but ministers were like dungeon bosses, so I figured this was fine.

Next up was my style of speech. I couldn't stay as a bottom-ranking employee—I had to master an appropriate style of speech. Your word choice clearly changed depending on your status, so I had to learn how to speak like a minister.

I underwent a strange, intensive training.

I practiced all through the night until the sun rose, and I established my form.



“Ha-ha-ha! My name is Beelzebub! I am the great Lord of the Flies! Prepare yourself, for I will make you painfully aware of what agriculture should be!” I recited, striking a pose in front of the mirror.

No—I *introduced* myself, taking my stance before the mirror.

“I am Beelzebub, demon noble and minister of agriculture. Adequate results will not be enough for those of you beneath me. Oh, talking like this might end up putting pressure on my subordinates, so I'll have to be careful... Oh shoot, now I'm talking like I used to...”

I'd been practicing my transformation this entire time.

Ten out of ten people might think I was joking around, but—

I wasn't joking around at all! I was super-serious!

Without these drastic changes, I didn't have confidence that I could carry out my work from now on...

And I wasn't *the* great Beelzebub, Lord of the Flies, of course. I could use magic that could turn me into a fly, and I did sometimes eat the bruised fruit at my parents' greengrocery back when I was working there. Actually, they were tastiest just before or just as they were beginning to rot.

Oh, no, no... I mean... Oh dear. Sheesh. I have to keep my inner voice consistent with my character.

I stared at myself in the mirror.

My clothes left my shoulders bare, and my hair was straightened to give me a more powerful image.

All I needed to do was show confidence on my face and hold myself high.

“I am Beelzebub, minister of agriculture. I am Beelzebub, minister of agriculture. I am Beelzebub, minister of agriculture, and so I shall act as of today. My inconspicuous self is a thing of the past.”

And so I went to work at the Agricultural Policy Organization for the first time as the new Beelzebub.

’Twas my debut as the minister of agriculture!

“Good morning. How fare my underlings?!”

My coworkers stared at me blankly.

Surely they were surprised by my noble carriage! Perhaps they thought I was a pure-blooded noble!

A lowly woman who was once my coworker slowly raised her hand and said—

“Beelzebub, you’re the minister of agriculture; I don’t think this is where you’re supposed to work...”

“.....Indeed. Old habits die hard.”

I left the room, my face bright red...

“I should not have left my comfort zone...”



I was a Bottom-Tier
Bureaucrat for 1500 years,
and the Demon King Made Me a Minister.

MY NAME IS
AGRICULTURAL
THE DEMON
BEELZEBUB,
MINISTER OF
REALM!



Communicating with My Underlings Is a Pain



There was a huge sign that said MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, and I stood before the building where it hung.

“So this is my workplace...” I looked up at it and recoiled. “I am suddenly working at the main office, and as the minister herself, no less...”

I’d been told that working in the ministry building was much harder than working at the related organizations, and I had been planning on consistently working not here but at the Agricultural Policy Organization.

It was once my path to victory...

“I can no longer go back... I cannot quit after two or three days; I have no choice but to work as the minister of agriculture...”

Bureaucratic officials busily came and went around me like ants hard at work.

It was now a new era with a new demon king, and that probably brought with it plenty of paperwork.

I watched it all for a while.

I had changed my image from a plain-glasses character to a high-ranking demon, and not only that, but no one recognized me as the minister because I barely knew anyone. That made it easy.

But on the other hand, when I entered the building, people stared at me, wondering who I was.

“...I should have come through the back door...”

I went up the floors by a staircase that wasn’t being used.

The minister’s office was a big room on the top floor. *Whew, I managed to get this far in secret.*

Then, when I slipped into the office—

I found a whole line of officials.

Everyone was gathered already!

I saw all sorts of different horns, as demons had. I even saw a minotaur and a Cyclops among them.

They all turned to face me at once, noticing my arrival.

This was bad for my heart. They were wondering why such a low-ranking worker was promoted to minister and thinking of how incompetent I was, I was sure...

Then a woman with unique horns took a step forward.

"Pardon me. I don't recognize you, so you must be Minister Beelzebub, yes?"

"I-indeed... It is I, Beelzebub..."

"Then I ask that you make a few remarks as you assume your post now. Oh, pardon me—I am Fatla the leviathan, secretary here at the Department of Agriculture," she said, unsmiling.

Leviathans were high-ranking demons in their own right.

At the moment, she resembled a human, but I'd heard that a leviathan's original form was like an airborne battleship that could carry hundreds of people.

So she must be a career civil servant...

I knew what she was thinking: *What a terrible joke, making a small fry like this into a minister.*

My stomach started hurting. My body wouldn't be absorbing anything I ate now.

"Some initial remarks, you say. Very well. I don't want to cause you any trouble, so I'll finish it quick...er, I shall finish this promptly, so stay there."

It was hard to play my supercilious character before officials who were *actually* important. But it would be awful if I made a fool of myself at first contact.

I stood before the officials. Walking just those few steps to reach my spot was spiritually exhausting, like walking through a deadly poisonous bog.

"Erm... I am Beelzebub, and I am the minister of agriculture as of today... In all honesty, I am powerless and unable to do much of importance, but I believe that together, we may overcome this...so..."

Was that okay?

But I was calling myself powerless; was I just making a fool of myself? Wouldn't that just tempt them to underestimate me?

I thought I heard someone snickering.

It was probably just paranoia, but I definitely thought I heard someone!

I have no choice but to toot my own horn now!

I spread out my wings in a snap.

"Twas but a joke! I have been chosen to take this place by the omniscient and omnipotent demon king! As such, I possess a great power that will guide you! So, so...er... Should there be anything you do not know or any problem you may have, you come to me!! I shall brilliantly solve all your problems as your superior!"

““““Yeah!!!””””

The officers raised their voices in admiration.

That was the right answer. I got through it without acting servile.

I heard whispers:

“She looks like she has it together.”

“Maybe she really is from a high-ranking family.”

My first impression wasn't bad.

“Perhaps she really is a policy expert.”

“Maybe she was, like, a right-hand man for the previous demon king.”

“You can keep an eye on a lot if you stay down at the lower levels.”

“She must be the reason all the high-ranking officials' scandals were exposed at the same time!”

Mmm... Now I suspect they are overestimating me!

“I was wondering what we'd do with a shabby entry-level worker, but that isn't the case at all.”

“She's a secret bigwig.”

“With her, we could even win our disputes with the finance ministry.”

“She must have the next hundred, two hundred years planned out for the demon race.”

“Long live the new minister!”

Their hopeful looks hurt more this time...

I'm not a policy expert, not even in a worst-case scenario...

I was just someone from a tiny, distant corner of the agricultural ministry. I was only ever confident in my abilities to do miscellaneous chores... I wasn't even thinking about what was going to happen in a month. The most I ever thought about was whether I was going to drink at home or at a bar on the weekends.

I thought I had to start showing results fit for a minister right away, otherwise things would be bad...

“Then you are dismissed... Get to it now...”

The officials poured out of the minister's office.

Phew, that was stressful. I was finally free...

But there were still two left in the room.

One was the earlier leviathan, Fatla. The other was another leviathan who looked a lot like her.

“Well done, Lady Beelzebub. Allow me to introduce myself again. I am Fatla, the secretary. It is my job to assist the minister of agriculture. It's a pleasure to meet you.”

Right, she did say she was a secretary earlier, too.

Oh man, I already had someone so square and straitlaced attached

to me. I wouldn't be able to relax like this...

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“Yes. A pleasure. And who’s that beside you?”

The second girl flung her hand into the air. “Hello! I’m Vania the leviathan. I’m the assistant secretary and Fatla’s little sister! It’s nice to meet you!”

I see. It was the sisters who were assisting me. Their personalities were exact opposites.

“Right, right. Well, it’s—’tis lovely to meet both of you.”

I stuck my hand out toward Fatla. A handshake was a general way to show respect.

Fatla grasped my hand, still not smiling. Maybe that was her default.

Asking her to smile didn’t seem like the right way to go about this, though.

“By the way, Lady Beelzebub?”

“What?”

“You’ve made quite the transformation. Is this your attempt at a debut as a minister?”

She hit me right where it hurt. The attack was surprisingly close to home.

“I don’t...do not understand what you mean.”

“That manner of speech of yours is a mere facade, and I can see your faults surfacing. You clearly rushed to create this whole charade after being forced into the position of minister, correct? You were planning on living your whole life as a lazy low-level clerk, weren’t you?”

This conversation was draining my magic dry...

“Q-uite the opposite... Now that I am a minister, I’m able to be myself, and, you know, it’s like the persona I’ve hidden all this time is rising to the surface...”

“Is that so? I see. I see now.”

This leviathan woman didn’t smile at all, so it was hard to tell what she was thinking. But from the circumstantial evidence, I was undoubtedly being cornered...

“My only duty is to make sure that the new minister is comfortable doing her work. Let me know if there’s anything I may help you with.”

“Yeah... All right.”

Our hands were still clasped together, but Fatla wasn’t letting me go.

I was above her in status, but I was from a family of scruffy demons, so I was nervous in front of a leviathan.

“However—”

Oh no. That “however” told me straightaway that what she just

said wasn't how she really felt!

"I'm not working because you're paying my salary, Lady Beelzebub. I am at most a bureaucrat working to support our country. If you are not fit for the office of minister and I judge that agricultural policy has regressed, then I will be taking the appropriate measures."

"So you're kicking me out if I don't do a good job..."

It wasn't hot at all, but I was starting to sweat.

This is scary! The bureaucratic world is terrifying! I wanna go back to the bottom!

"I don't appreciate the term *kick out*. I will simply take the proper steps to deal with the situation as a public servant," Fatla continued in a monotonous voice. "In the event of any major mistakes, I will suggest that you make it public instead of attempting a cover-up; I will question you if I see any dishonest accounting; I will suggest you quit if you find yourself unable to bear the weight of your duties as minister because you are unwell—and any other such measures I deem necessary."

Ahhh! She's totally gonna kick me out!

"And so I would be perfectly fine if you considered me as a regular secretary."

This is intimidation! What am I supposed to do if my own secretary is my enemy?! This is like putting the demon king in the hero's party! I wanna quit!

But if I quit, then the demon king would be responsible for appointing someone new, and I suspected I'd be erased from existence for the crime of besmirching the demon king's name. There was no real assurance that I would be safe if I quit.

There was no way out...

"I got it. I've spent fifteen hundred years at the bottom of the ministry, after all. I am not a complete amateur. I will do everything in my power!" I told her sharply.

But she was still stern with me.

"Very well. I sincerely hope you are right." Fatla finally let me go.

These leviathan sisters weren't my assistants. They were monitoring me.

Once my handshake with the elder sister was finished, the younger sister, Vania, immediately skipped over to me and shook my hand.

"Can't wait to get started, boss!"

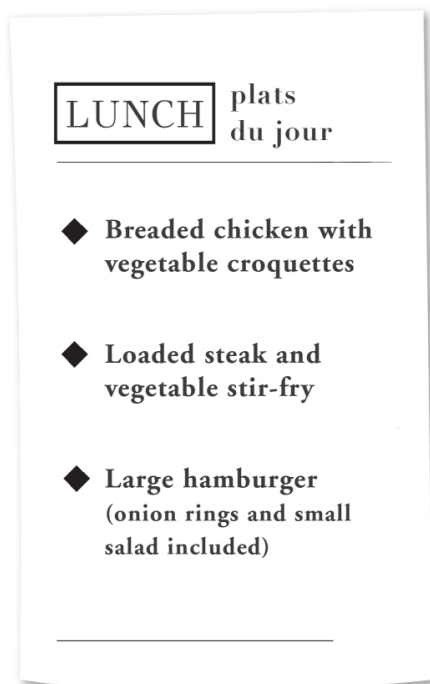
"Yes, of course."

I had to keep my guard up—she could be acting like a sunny, cheerful girl when she was actually the mastermind behind it all.

In the action novels I read in the past, the more a character smiled, the stronger they were, and they wouldn't bat an eye when it

came to killing others.

“All right, then, boss. There’s something I need for you to pick.”



“And what might that be...?”

I didn’t know if I was being tested or anything, so I was extremely uneasy.

Vania produced a piece of paper.

“We need to contact the traders who deliver lunch soon. Which one do you want, boss?”

These choices had nothing to do with work!

“Vania, you can leave this for later...”

Fatla, the elder sister, looked at her with annoyance, silently asking her not to ruin the mood.

“Whaaat? Picking what to have for lunch is so important, though! It helps give you another push in the morning.”

The younger sister had the energy of an entry-level worker. There sure were all sorts of people on the career ladder...

“Then...I suppose I shall have the loaded steak-and-vegetable stir-fry...”

“Okay! I will put in that order right away! Oh, and by the way, I’m very good at cooking, so as long as you let me know beforehand, I can make lunch for you about once a week.”

“That’s not secretary work!”

The big sister, Fatla, was angry again.

Maybe they had been appointed together as secretaries because they canceled each other out and worked well together as a pair?



My work as the minister of agriculture started that day.

My main job was signing things.

The signing itself took only a fraction of a second to do, but when it came to matters that needed the approval of the minister, the matters themselves had to have some weight, and occasionally they involved the movement of astronomical sums of money. I couldn't just scribble on these and call it a day.

Having said that, if I vetoed all the things that had been considered okay up until this point just because I was at the top, I'd be a tyrant.

And so I had to sign things while also carefully checking the contents.

Luckily, I had a very knowledgeable secretary with me, so that made it easy.

Fatla was the perfect bureaucrat.

The new demon king must have had a say in these personnel appointments beforehand, so maybe she put the sisters here as my personal support, regardless of what Fatla herself thought.

"This farm should not pose any problems, yes? I believe they could produce this more cheaply, though."

"You may check anything concerning the budget in the attached document."

"Can I ask you some things about this application for authorization?"

"Certainly. There isn't much time to ruminate on it, however, so do make up your mind quickly."

In a word, I'd say I was doing pretty well. But I wasn't exactly enthusiastic about it all; I was just desperate. There was no room for me to slack off and do sloppy work.

For the first three months, I dedicated a lot of time to getting a grasp on the current state of the agricultural administration.

I had lunch with people beneath me who were responsible for relevant matters as much as I could, and then I examined each department's own problems and what they perceived to be problems.

I could do only what I could, so that was what I did.

I put everything I learned down into my notes.

It was a lot of trouble, but I ended up creating volume after

volume of notes. This was my strategy for dealing with things, one that I had cultivated when I was a low-level employee.

Write and remember. Write and arrange.

When things felt difficult and confusing, they could be conquered in this manner. Learn a strategy to deal with it and understand the precedents!



Six months went by in a flash.

“You are quite the stickler for notes, Lady Beelzebub,” Fatla said to me as she was checking documents on the desk beside mine.

She was making her little sister, Vania, do mostly menial tasks, like disposing of or retrieving documents.

It wasn’t too odd for her position, since she was a lower-ranked secretary, and she personally enjoyed moving around.

“Tis much harder for me to forget things when I write them down with my own hand like this. No matter how many documents I collect, I have such trouble remembering the government’s style. If I make a little list of all the things in the library, I can find them immediately; I wouldn’t be able to find them without one, no? It’s the same idea.”

I’d even gotten quite used to my grandiloquent minister speech after six months.

At the moment, I hadn’t made any big mistakes. I hadn’t been impeached yet, at least, so I supposed that meant it was going quite well.

I didn’t have any opportunities to do anything untoward, so I wasn’t involved in corruption at all. Well, I didn’t even belong to any faction, so I suppose there was little to be gained by abusing my power...

“I see. You are a different breed from all the past ministers, Lady Beelzebub.” Fatla finished her checks and placed the documents on my desk. “They all have been eager to be political—or should I say, eager to wield the power they’d accumulated. Perhaps it’s a given, considering this is the highest position they may reach without the blood of a demon king, but in exchange, they tended to neglect the fundamental work.”

“That’s because I started from the bottom—well, more like I leaped from the bottom straight to the top. Of course my perspective is different.”

Recently, I started to be able to pinpoint where the main point of a document was amid the complicated language. Practice was everything. I determined that there were no problems and gave my signature.

“To be honest, I said some brash things to you when we first met, but now I realize that my comments were unwarranted,” Fatla said suddenly. She stood to face me, then bowed her head. “Please forgive me for testing you.”

I turned my gaze right back to the documents. It was nothing to apologize for.

“Tis only natural to worry that an unknown was suddenly the minister of agriculture. While they were not as open about it as you were, others were certainly thinking the same way. If a newbie is angry at being called a newbie, then a cow might as well be angry at being called a cow.”

“Thank you.” Fatla bowed.

I thought I saw a little smile on her face, but I couldn’t really tell because I was focused on paperwork.

“There’s no reason to give your thanks. Now get back to work. After you do a bit more, you should take some time off and spend it with your little sister. I can keep things moving without a secretary for a day, at least. I have most things memorized now.”

“Very well. I will strive to match your clerical prowess, Lady Beelzebub.”

“I doubt there is much difference between our skills.”

“No, you are truly the most capable of all the recent ministers of agriculture, Lady Beelzebub.”

That was probably because I didn’t conspire with other high-up officers.

The role of a worker at the bottom was just doing clerical tasks as the situation called for it. When someone climbed up from such a position, people would start one-upping each other with what sort of projects they did in their time.

I was still merely a clerk at heart. I acted all high-and-mighty for show, but I hadn’t changed the way I lived.

“That being said, it’s always around the six-month mark after beginning a new post that people tend to let their guard down and make bigger mistakes, so do be careful.”

“Yes, of course. I understand. I am still not relaxed enough to let my guard down yet.”

Now, next was some work relating to the construction of a seed nursery center. Many people were going to be removed from the land as part of that process, so I had a large number of valuable documents asking for consent to remove the residents there.

“Mmm? All the documents that should have been here are gone.”

The things I had placed next to Vania’s spot on my left were missing.

Vania was up from her seat, burning documents we didn’t need

anymore in the furnace.

"Vania, the set of seed nursery center documents is gone. Where is it?"

"Huh? I thought you didn't need those anymore? You always put the documents you don't need anymore to your left, right?"

"No, I placed them to the open spot on my left because it would take time to check them."

Vania's face went white. "I—I—I—I—I—I burned them..."

"You did *whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat*?????????"

The one who let her guard down six months after taking the post wasn't me but my secretary!!!!

Vania fell to her knees, and Fatla pulled her up with a blank expression. There was no emotion on her face, but I could tell she was furious.

"You were supposed to double-check every single document you take from this room before destroying it. Did you do that?"

"I-I'm sorry... I thought they were in a discard pile..."

"This is a huge question of liability. You will most certainly be demoted, and according to precedent, we might have you resign at your own convenience."

"Wait, I'm fired? Am I going to be fired...?"

"Those papers included documents asking for the consent to remove over fifty civilian households, as well as those of various other related parties. It would take an immense amount of time to go around and ask each and every one of these people to write them all over again, please and thanks. In the worst-case scenario, this would delay construction by one or two months..." Fatla's voice was growing louder and louder. "Quitting is the least you could do!"

Fatla's hand slowly wrapped around Vania's neck.

That was a leviathan hand, so her grip was probably insanely strong.

"E-erm... Isn't there any way we can find an amicable compromise, Big Sis...?"

"You will have to bear the blame. Otherwise, the responsibility rests on Lady Beelzebub's shoulders! Secretaries have disappeared after taking the fall for such incidents! Although I suppose the secretary really was at fault this time..."

Fatla's hands were shaking.

It was definitely hard for her to say such things to her sister.

But it was also true that we needed a scapegoat in this incident. It wouldn't resolve itself.

Oh well.

I slowly stood.

We'll just have a scapegoat, then.

“Fatla, rearrange the schedule. Once we’ve estimated how long this will delay the project, we will go apologize to each party. Most people will have no choice but to forgive us if I apologize. If the minister herself goes, I doubt anyone will lose face.”

“B-but you have absolutely no fault in this matter, Lady Beelzebub...,” Fatla said hesitantly.

It was her own relative who made the mistake, so it was probably especially difficult to stick up for her.

“Don’t be a fool. ’Tis the boss’s job to take responsibility for her subordinates. I had many bosses bow in my stead when I was a low-level clerk. Now I must be the one to apologize. If all I do is offer my apology, then there is nothing more you need to do!”

We just needed to get this nonsense done and out of the way.

“Now, Fatla, create the necessary documents. The quicker we apologize, the lesser the damages. And while we are at it, we shall also create preventative measures to ensure this does not happen again. There should be no more problems if we only place documents for destruction on a separate desk.”

“Y-yes!” Fatla tensed her shoulders and responded with a high, strained voice.

“But first, take a deep breath. That is all.”

Fatla inhaled deeply as she was commanded, then gave a very long exhale.

“Understood. I will devise remedial measures right away.”

Afterward, Vania and I paid each party concerned a visit, apologized for the loss of the documents, and spent almost the whole time with our heads bowed to the floor.

The minister herself appearing for the incident had a tremendous effect, and it was understood that we would be re-creating the documents internally at the ministry.

Thus, we went on our apology pilgrimage, and thanks to Fatla’s efficient schedule, there wasn’t much damage done in terms of time.

It was times like these that I was thankful we could fly on the leviathans’ enormous forms.

But I couldn’t go too fast, so I clung to Vania when we went to certain places.

We were finally done apologizing and re-creating documents after about two weeks, and we somehow managed to settle the matter without any delays to construction.

“Phew, that’s finally over!”

After I had carefully gone over every re-created form, I stretched my body and wings.

Fatla was stretching at her own seat as well.

“There is no need for you to bow your head anymore, Vania! How many times do you think you’ve bowed in total this time?” I said, intending to make a joke—

But it fell completely flat.

“I...I am truly sorry, so very sorry...”

When Vania had gone out with me to apologize, she had been frightened and jumpy the whole time, like a frog before a snake.

I wouldn’t approve if she’d been laughing the whole time we were out apologizing, but the constant doom and gloom made things difficult, too.

This was one of those times I had to act like a boss. I patted Vania on the shoulder and said, “Are you free today? I would like to have a drink with you—how about it?”

“A-all right...” Vania’s face went even paler.

Wait, don’t tell me—maybe bosses aren’t supposed to invite their subordinates to drink in this day and age...?



I didn’t take Vania to a loud tavern but instead to a fancy bar.

I’d heard from my officers that this place had a decent reputation.

“Order what you like. The food here is quite good.”

But even after I’d brought her all the way here, Vania was stiffer than before. I almost mistook her for a gargoyle instead of a leviathan.

“Relax. You’re quite important yourself—take up as much space as you need.”

“I—I can’t...”

Hmm? This was strange. I read in a how-to book that the boss treated everyone jovially at times like these, but this was feeling more like a funeral...

Was she afraid I would boast on and on about the past or force her to split the bill at such an expensive restaurant?

I was paying for everything. And since I had been a bottom-tier worker, there was nothing for me to brag about. From the way she was acting, I had a feeling she was afraid of something else.

What else could there be?

Maybe she’d made an even bigger mistake...? If she had, then I wasn’t sure how much more I could cover for her...

“If there is something that troubles you, speak up. That is why we’ve come here. My lips are sealed. I am your boss, after all.”

I had subordinates now. I would act like the boss I was supposed to be!

“A-a-all right... Then let me ask you bluntly...”

“O-okay...”

“Um... You’re demoting me, aren’t you...?”

I almost fell from my barstool. “What do you mean, ‘aren’t you’? When did I ever mention demoting you?”

“I mean, I’ve smeared your name with this whole incident... I thought some form of retaliation was inevitable...”

“Wait, wait, wait! That makes no sense! Why do you think I went to apologize with you?!”

What a shock! I wasn’t telling her to be thankful for everything I did for her; I just wanted her to be glad that she wasn’t being punished!

“That’s what I thought at first, but...then you invited me alone to such an expensive restaurant, so I thought, ‘Oh, she must be announcing the end of my clerical life...’”

That’s how she interpreted this?!

“And then I started imagining all sorts of things, like how I’d be put in a windowless room to count the number of rejected papers...”

“There is no such job.”

“I spent this whole time thinking, ‘Maybe it’s fine because I’ll still get paid; maybe it’s better than quitting; no wait, maybe I should just quit anyway...’”

Didn’t that go against her obligation to give her undivided attention to her duty?

I patted her on the shoulder.

“Ahhh...the fabled shoulder tap... I knew I was being demoted! I’m going to be flown out to the far, uninhabited reaches of the north and placed at a counter where no one will ever come!”

“You need to let this go already.” I gulped down some of the expensive alcohol. “Look, I invited you out to drink today because you have been looking down. Drink as much as you want to forget your troubles. That is all I wanted to say.”

“Th-then...you’re not demoting me...?”

“Of course not. Drink and forget the pain of the past. Order freely: I shall pay for it all!”

“...Boss...are you a god?!”

“Not at all. I am a demon.” I grinned like a high-ranking demon.

That was the first time in my life I treated someone as a proper boss would.

I was maturing, too.

I didn’t mind the bottom-tier life, but perhaps the minister life wouldn’t be so bad after all.

—Two hours later.

I walked through the city with a drunk Vania on my back. “I never expected she’d be causing me problems in this way...”

“Eh-he-he-he... Booze, booze...”

Vania was completely gone, so I had to take her home myself. I did such things when I was a lowly clerk and my bosses drank themselves into a stupor, but to think I'd do this as the minister of agriculture...

I wanted to fly her home, but I was drunk, too. Causing an accident while flying under the influence was a grave offense...

I somehow managed to reach the residential district, and there was Fatla, standing at the corner.

“I am so sorry, Lady Beelzebub. My sister is so irresponsible...” She bowed to me with a tired look.

“You’ve been putting in quite a lot of work as well, haven’t you? But I clearly see why you were chosen to be my secretary.”

“What do you mean?” She looked at me quizzically.

“Your hands are quite full taking care of your little sister. That is why they deemed you capable of handling a minister who did not know her right from her left.”

Fatla’s mouth opened in surprise.

She had treated me rather gruffly at first but was still a solid assistant for me after all that. She worked hard, exactly as she needed to as a good secretary.

Otherwise, my efforts on my own were insignificant; my work as minister wouldn’t be very effective.

Had Fatla not created countermeasures for Vania’s mistake this time, things would have been more complicated for much longer. And if that happened, I would probably have had to drop the problematic secretary after all.

“Fatla, do you think I can become a minister good enough for you to serve?”

“As of now, you’re about seventy-five percent there.”

I wanted eighty, but that was still a passing grade.

“Now do something about your sister.” I handed over Vania.

“Lady Beelzebub, I am truly glad you are our minister.” Fatla gave me a gentle, natural smile.

“And I’ll take you to a good spot next time, too.”

The night breeze on my way home felt perfect.

I think I’m starting to enjoy my work as the minister of agriculture.



My Parents Visited Me from Home

“Oh, I see nothing else for me to sign.”

“Lady Beelzebub, that one was the last for today. Well done,” Fatla said, straightening out the stack of paper by tapping it against the desk.

That was high praise coming from Fatla. One might not notice at first, but she rarely openly complimented me. Though I suppose it would be strange if my own employee came up to me, patted me on the head, and called me a good girl.

Ah yes. I suppose I can rest a little now.

These lulls in the deluge of paperwork weren’t so bad—when things started getting down to the wire, my hands could get so full that I couldn’t afford to stand up and stretch.

“Boss, you’ve gotten a lot faster at work!” Vania cheered. Praise from both ends of the spectrum. But of course—

“Vania, please do something about that desk of yours...”

—there were still mountains of paperwork waiting on Vania.

“Boy, I’d planned on finishing a while ago, but then I was dreaming about a school trip from years and years back...”

“You were sleeping?! Do your job!”

I had to help her anyway. Alas, my poor break. Still, work was far easier now than it once was; there was no doubt about that. Recently, I could even afford to pamper myself on my days off.

Although, to be more specific, I had far too many rooms in my house to use well, so I simply sequestered myself in the few rooms I lived in and slept until noon...

My standard of living had not changed much. Actively improving my living situation required far too much effort.

“Oh right. I forgot to check if any of the afternoon mail is for you!” Vania rushed out of the room.

“That girl forgets too much... Why can’t she do things properly...?” Fatla rubbed her temples.

Her life must have been quite an ordeal, looking after her sister for so long. This was Fatla’s career, yes, but her time in it would not

have been purely smooth sailing. All lives had their ups and downs.

Or perhaps that was the natural consequence for those who didn't put as much effort as I did into maintaining an uneventful, predictable life. Even the fields that seem flat from far away are full of ridges and stones once you walk through them.

But right now, the demon king's schemes had me working as the minister of agriculture, so I hadn't exactly succeeded in my endeavor...

If I'd known this would happen, perhaps I should have taken over my family's grocery store in the countryside? No, running a shop would bring its own challenges. I would be in debt in the worst-case scenario. That wasn't for me. I made the right choice in coming to Vanzeld.

A little while later, Vania returned with a basket full of mail.

"Here's your afternoon letter drop, boss!"

"Mmm, well done. Just put them there."

I would sort through it myself. Few letters came to the minister directly.

As usual, more than half of what I received were farming magazines. Several departments within the ministry were subscribed to them.

"*Demon Farmers Monthly*, *Demon Farming Tools Monthly*, *Farming Artifacts Monthly*, *Wheat Cultivation Monthly*, *Double-Cropping Monthly*, *Cyclops & Lumber Monthly*, *Pests Monthly*... There are too many magazines."

"It is what it is. Telling them we want to unsubscribe will only hurt the image of the Ministry of Agriculture. Even if you do not read a single page, we must purchase them as a perfunctory measure," Fatla said breezily.

Some of these magazines were very strange, and I knew little about the corporations that created them. I wasn't so sure about using tax money to purchase these. But it wasn't my own money, so it was all right.

"I love the columns in *Cyclops & Lumber Monthly*. They don't hold back; it's so refreshing. Hardly anyone reads it, so they can be as aggressive as they want!"

"Oh, so you have time to read *these*, do you...?"

I wish she would show off some of that diligence when it came to work.

Among the magazines, there was a small envelope addressed to me that caught my eye.

(Beelzebub's
parents)



South of
Amond Hamlet,
Gorantalla Village,
Toha County
Bandido &
Kentohmi



“Oh, a personal letter? I was under the impression that I shouldn’t be able to receive things like this.”

There were plenty of troublemakers who wanted to tell me, the head of the ministry, their personal opinions on things.

There would truly be no end to their complaints if the minister were to read them all, so there was a different department that checked the contents of these letters. That meant this envelope had already been opened.

“Who is this from?” I flipped the envelope over.

“*Bufuh*—” I’m not sure how to categorize the sound I made, but I suppose it was closest to a sob.

An envelope from my parents!

I checked inside and found a note.

“*Bffffff...*”

I made another noise, louder this time.

Dearest daughter,

How ya been? Never thought

you'd be a minister! We're

headin' to Vanzeld Castle next

weekend we get, so show us

around, all right? We'll be on

the express dulla-han that gets

to the north clock tower

before noon.

(Beelzebub's father)

Bandido

They're coming! This is way too sudden!

I couldn't use work as an excuse if they were coming on a weekend, so I had to show them around... It was as if I'd been surprised with a weekend shift... Please release me...

I hadn't been home in the past several years; there was nothing enjoyable for me there.

But I had not accounted for the possibility that they might visit me.

"Lady Beelzebub, what's the matter? You're making some odd noises," Fatla pointed out. *So even they can tell...*

I couldn't have them knowing about this.

"Tis nothing..."

"I doubt anyone would react this way over nothing."

"Oh, no, I simply have something in my windpipe."

"If that's true, then please go to the doctor."

If anyone saw my parents, the humiliation would be unimaginable. This was too difficult.

Vania never had much to do on the weekends as far as I could tell. If she found out that my parents were coming, then she might stake out some famous sightseeing spots.

You may think my terror is an overreaction; after all, it's only a visit from my parents. Perhaps some of you might even be thinking about how *I* was before my makeover.

You know nothing.

"It was a fan letter for me from a civilian. Even we bureaucrats have our supporters. I must concentrate and continue to do my best."

I wrapped up that conversation neatly and forcefully, then immediately stuffed the letter into my bag.

Once I had written down where we were to meet, I would burn it...



That weekend, I stood before the north clock tower. This was a transportation hub for all different means of transit from many different regions.

The express dullahan carriages were one of those. My parents could fly, but long distances were exhausting, so they'd chosen to take the overnight express.

Finally, an express dullahan from my home region came to a stop at the parking area.

The driver opened the door to the carriage, and out came my parents, both of them wearing straw hats that were too wide. They

were so big, they nearly got caught on the door. Where in the world do they sell hats like those...?

"Woooo, Beelzebub, lookitchu! I'll be a nettle on a bee, you barely look like my girl!"

My father, Bandido, stepped forward. (The expression about nettles and bees meant he was surprised.)

My mother, Kentohmi, then exited the carriage.

"Sure's sugar! Whatta right flar yuwar now, Beelzebub!"

My mother's accent was so strong, I doubted anyone who wasn't local would be able to understand her.

Also, what she just said was *Indeed! You've become quite lovely, Beelzebub!*

"I wish you would've given me more advance notice... It may be a day off for me, but I do sometimes have to make inspections for the ministry, you see..."

My parents looked at each other and burst out laughing. And so loudly, too! *People are staring!*

"Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Beelzebub, why're you talkin' all hoity-toity? I'm a right thicket *full o' bees!*"

"Why y'gotta go talkin' fromma high horse? Nettle my bees, I'm rightan my reer now!"

"Oh, it's all right! You understand me, don't you?! And the way you talk, Ma, it's like code only locals can understand!"

Also, my mother said, *You're speaking with such authority. What is the meaning of this? I find it so bizarre that my legs nearly collapsed beneath me, truly!*

And yes, I call my parents Ma and Pa. That's typical where I come from.

But soon after moving to Vanzeld, I stopped using those terms of address after discovering it was a very rural way of speaking.

"Wow, ben me-yup, Beelzebub, with'r city talk and city look!"

"Ma, please at least make an effort to use the standard dialect. I don't mind if you speak to me like that, but people in the shops most definitely won't be able to understand a word you say..."

I could hear passersby behind us conversing: "What language is that?" "Dunno. Human speech is easier to understand than that." "I saw a study that said Human and Demon languages are rapidly getting more and more similar now that the war's over."

No one caught a word. Of course they didn't. Even I was having some trouble after spending so long away from home.

"Well. You're here to sightsee, then?"

"We wanna see the Topallar Temple Ruins!"

"Pa, even if we left now, we wouldn't get there until nightfall..."

"Huh? Ain't it right 'round here?"

That was when I knew they had come with no plans.

But perhaps that would be more convenient for me. If we stuck to the main sightseeing areas, then it was unlikely someone I knew would find us. I doubted even Vania would be wandering around the most touristy areas.

“Then I shall lead the way. Be thankful.”

“Scuzy ratawn, then, ya mawn-pa’r seenasitty!”

I’m not entirely sure what my mother said, unfortunately.

“Here, this is the Hundredth Triumphal Arch! Just as the name suggests, this one was the one hundredth triumphal arch built, so it was named thusly!”

“Hoo-wee... It’s massive...”

“Shoo’nup lakachree!”

The first speaker was my father, and the second was my mother voicing her thoughts, which meant *How tall!*

Yes, going around to see the usual sights would entertain them enough, so I doubted this would be too exhausting—

“All right, Beelzebub. What’s next?”

“Already?! That was fast!”

It had only been a minute since we came.

“See, we’ve gotta go around to all the places we can, or we’ll waste our day. We’re using profits from the shop t’day.”

“Very well... Then next, I shall take you to the Abyssal Springs...”

After five seconds at the spring, my father said, “Awright! What’s next?”

“Er, would you mind sitting with your thoughts on the spring for a little while longer...?”

“It’s a monster spittin’ black water. Got no other thoughts.”

That was the truth, so I could not fault him for it.

My mother said something, too, but I could no longer understand a single word out of her. As mother and daughter, perhaps we could simply sense each other’s feelings. Yes, it was fine.

Afterward, I introduced them to many, many spots all over.

To be honest, I was rather tired. My throat, especially.

Not only did I have to take them to these places, but I also had to explain what was special about each of them.

And since my parents were visiting many more of them than a typical tourist would, I was doing an astronomical amount of work...

“Umm, this is a lake with a legend where...a demon king, many generations ago, received a spear from a, uh...fiend.”

“Beelzebub, your explanations are gettin’ all *bower*.”

Bower was a regional term for “sloppy.”

“Oh, give it a rest. They say throwing a coin into the lake will make your wishes come true, but it’s advised that you not pollute the water. I am exhausted... I’d say you two are rather energetic for such a trip... And at your age...”

Even among the long-lived demons, my parents were starting to look middle-aged. That could apparently be fixed with antiaging magic, though.

“Used to it at the store, y’see. We sell heavy barrels of real nice-quality water. And wheat’s pretty heavy. And carryin’ used horse carts and whatnot can wear ya out, too. And the big sheep...”

What?

Something wasn’t right...

“Aren’t you grocers?! Why are you selling used carts and sheep?!”

“No other shop to sell ’em at. So we trade it all.”

I suppose that happened in the countryside... I started to doubt whether they even carried groceries anymore.

My mother then said, “Where’s’a mu’n, Beelzebub?”

“Indeed. I’m getting hungry, so I suppose we should eat.”

I wanted to rest a little bit as well, so it was perfect timing.

I took my parents to a somewhat modern restaurant, one that wasn’t too trendy for a middle-aged couple.

In my personal opinion, restaurants marketing to young people looking for the next dining revolution didn’t always have good food. Famous establishments with a long history generally had a much higher standard.

“That hits the spot~” “Woo, scrum!”

“Right? I doubt you can find anything as good as this in the countryside~”

Oh...

That was when I realized something. I’d gone native.

The town around the castle was practically my home now...

I hadn’t cooked the food in this establishment, of course, but the compliment still did wonders for my confidence.

Then my eyes met my father’s.

“Beelzebub, it is such a relief to see you like this.”

My father, who had worn an expression of feigned ignorance, now looked at me seriously. My mother was the same.

“What do you mean, Pa?”

I was never quite certain how to handle their parental side.

“When we heard you was a minister, yer ma and I thought there musta been some kinda mistake. We didn’t even brag t’ the neighbors till we were sure it was real.”

Wait, that meant they waited a month to start going around

boasting? C'mon.

"Ma said ain't no way you woulda got that promotion. Started worryin' you'd run back home with yer tail between yer legs!"

My mother laughed, scratching her head with embarrassment

"But I see we shouldn'a worried. Ya look great livin' it up here, city girl!"

I suppose that meant my parents were recognizing my accomplishments.

At that moment, I wasn't quite sure how to react to that.

Do I simply reply, Thanks? But I don't think I've earned it with the life I've been living. I haven't changed that much.

"When you said you were sick o' country life and ran off to the city, I thought it'd be too much for you."

My father stared up at the ceiling.

For a little while after that, no one spoke.

He wasn't entirely wrong. I'd nearly fled from the town around the castle more than once during my most impulsive phase.

Eventually, I'd chosen to strive for a life without much adventure, but had I wished for no adventure at all, I never would have come to the city in the first place.

"But this whole time, you were workin' in the government. Your ma and I were thinkin' 'bout how we failed you. Our girl had all this potential, and her parents never noticed 'cause she came from the boonies."

"I was simply a pencil pusher. 'Tis not much to be proud of..."

My appetite was nearly gone now.

"You might not be proud of it, but someone thought you had the chops to be a minister."

Who could that "someone" be? Had it really been the demon king herself? Or was it someone *else* who made the suggestion?

Either way, the truth was that my life had made a dramatic turn because of this someone.

"Keep yer nose to the grindstone and remember yer ma and pa are always thinkin' of you back home. We'll manage the store on our own. I ain't gonna ask you anything farrem like taking over the shop."

Farrem—that meant "killjoy" or "boring."

I guess he couldn't ask the nation's agricultural minister to take care of their local shop.

No matter one's age, a blessing from one's parents is always a welcome thing. "I appreciate that. I had no intention of taking over the store to begin with."

"We have five branches now, and we've got great managers lookin' over 'em."

What?!

That was some unusual news.

“Hey! When did you open branches?! I didn’t know about this!”

“We got real popular after we started expanding our stock. And we don’t have too much in the way of competition since we’re out in the country. We bought up dead stores, remodeled ’em, and set up shop there.”

Honestly...? I hadn’t the faintest clue that my parents were so business savvy, but I had assumed they were putting in at least some effort if their grocery store hadn’t gone under yet...

“No need to worry about us. And you keep ministerin’, y’hear?!”

My mother was nodding enthusiastically, too. In the end, they were encouraging me.

“You don’t need to tell me to work!” I joked.

Then I felt a chill.

“Oh yes, the level at this restaurant is so high~ It will really help me improve my own cooking.”

Vania entered the restaurant!

I most certainly did not want to introduce my parents to her. If she heard their accent, then it would be clear as day that my manner of speech was entirely artificial. I had a feeling she might know already, but the true distance between our levels of refinement was rather intimidating.

“And it’s great for a girl to eat alone. I can order anything I want—the way it should be!”

I slowly stood from my seat. “Apologies, but I must go wash my hands. If I am not back soon, then please take your time finishing your meal. We will be leaving once I return.”

I shut myself inside the bathroom stall for a little while to make absolutely sure that I did not encounter Vania.

My apologies to the establishment, but some problems required sacrifice!

I returned to the table with utter nonchalance.

“All right, it seems you have both finished eating. Now, shall we depart? Yes!”

And thus, I gracefully avoided all contact with Vania.

When we left, it was already nighttime. We’d finished sightseeing, too.

“We had lots of fun today.”

“Whadda mendical tahn, Beelzebub.”

“I’m glad to hear it.”

I wasn’t exactly sure what my mother just said, but from context, I could tell she had enjoyed herself.

“We’ll be in the city for the next few days, but your ma and I will

be sightseeing alone together. Work hard.”

“Of course. I shall do my utmost.”

I would have to visit them next time.

My day off was not relaxing at all, but I suppose that was all right every once in a while.

“I shall take you to your hotel tonight, then. Where are you staying?”

“Venalleg inyer’an, Beelzebub!”

“Ma, could you please speak closer to the standard language...?”

“Ma said, *We don’t have an inn. We’ll be staying at your house for the next few days. Spending hotel money would be a waste. Please lend us one of your empty rooms, and we’ll manage on our own. Where’s your house?*”

How did her dialect compress so much information into such a little phrase...?

But that did not matter.

They were planning on staying at *my* house!!

My palatial residence was rotten with rooms, yes. Not literally rotting—although there were many rooms that were quite dusty since I never cleaned them.

But...I could not *abide* being in the same building as them! I would never know a moment’s peace. And they would come and peek into my room... If not when I was at home, then certainly while I was at work...

“I shall reserve a place for you at one of the finest hotels! Are you not glad your daughter is a minister now?! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

Now was not the time to be stingy! I had money, and I definitely planned to flex a little!

After shoving my parents into a hotel that looked no less like a palace than my own house, I went home.

Once I walked through the door, I realized something.

“I had no idea today had exhausted me so... My shoulders are so stiff...”

I flopped onto my bed.



“Good morning, ma’am!”

When I arrived at the ministry for work, the others employed in the building greeted me.

“Aye, good morning. Do your best today.”

I gracefully entered my office. Inside, the two leviathan secretaries were already at work.

“Good morning, Lady Beelzebub.”

“Morning, boss!”

“Now that the holiday is over, let’s get back to work.”

Yes, this was my home battlefield. The unique challenges presented by my parents’ sudden visit over the weekend had worn me down, but that was over and done with. I hoped they did all the sightseeing they wanted before returning to the countryside.

But two hours later—

Knock, knock, knock-knock, knock.

How uncouth. Who would knock on the door like an amateur percussionist?

—the door then flung open.

“Heya, Beelzebub! How ya doin’?”

“Dag’n a vier, Beelzebub!”

My parents walked in!

And I knew despair.

“Why are you here?! Leave right now!”

But they ignored me and started talking to my secretaries.

“Thanks for always lookin’ out for our Beelzebub. I’m Bandido, her pa. This here’s my wife, Kentohmi. Here, have some of our local sweets and a few of our finest vegetables.”

For a moment, Fatla turned to the side.

“Pfft...”

She most certainly turned away to laugh just now, didn’t she?

But Fatla’s recovery was impressive. Afterward, she treated my parents with her usual matter-of-fact expression.

“Thank you. I am Fatla, a leviathan, secretary to the minister of agriculture.”

“I am also Vania, a leviathan. Wow, I can barely understand you. Where are you from?”

Don’t say it outright!

“Aww, shucks. You think I’ve got an accent, just wait’ll ya hear my wife! Your ministry buildin’ sure is tall! We went round givin’ out sweets and vegetables at every floor, so we’re plumb wore out!”

Now I knew true despair.

They said hello to everyone at every floor...?

I believe it was a historian who once wrote, *There is no greater enemy than one’s closest relatives*, and I now knew that meaning well. To be honest, I wish I didn’t.

“Begone, the both of you, now! I do not want to commit parricide! Go, go, go, go home!” I screamed.

For a little while after that, Vania took to greeting me with “Mornin’, ma’am!”

“Vania, every time you say that to me, the hatred toward you within me grows. I hope you are prepared for the consequences...”

But Fatla's surreptitious chuckling was even more infuriating!



I Was Almost Bribed During an Audit

“One, two, one, two, one, two!”

Lately, I’d been running around the castle’s inner moat before reporting in to work, putting my morning to good use.

A passerby who was walking his hellhound early in the morning (the general public is allowed as far as the outer side of the inner moat) said, “Oh-ho! Trying to lose weight, are you?”

Nope. I was exerting myself for a completely different reason.

When I’d finished my usual two laps around the moat and was resting in the shade of the trees, someone came over in front of me.

“You’re out working hard very early, Miss Beelzebub, minister of agriculture.”

It was the very one responsible for my position: Her Majesty the demon king, Provato Pecora Ariés. She was by herself today, under a parasol.

They said she hardly ever went around with attendants and that she popped up randomly all over the castle. In fact, I’d run into her several times myself, so I knew that was true.

“Oh, fancy meeting you here, Your Majesty.” I started to get up, but she put out a hand, stopping me.

“You’re training yourself physically to build the strength not to embarrass yourself as a minister, aren’t you?”

“...Was it that obvious?”

“I have an *excellent* eye for my subordinates.” Her Majesty sat down beside me.

She was mischievous, but she tended not to act all high-and-mighty. When she first ascended the throne, some demons were uneasy about that, but lately, she’d acquired a fine reputation as a demon king who did what it took.

“I’m a minister, whether I’m suited to the position or not... It would be embarrassing if I couldn’t defeat my own subordinates.”

In the demon world, even among bureaucrats, we tended to lionize strong fighters. Maybe it was a holdover from when we fought humans long ago.

When you're at minister level, some more conservative types believe you're doing something wrong if you can't nonchalantly plunge humans into terror.

Even now, people from noble stock who tended to end up at minister level were put through the mill from a young age, and they were pretty formidable, both physically and magically.

Here in the demon world, we didn't have pampered young nobles. Most of ours were tough.

"And not only do I hit harder, I believe I've managed to beef up my Ice and Snow spell quite a bit lately, too. I'll have to keep developing it—well, enough to let me defeat my two leviathan secretaries without trouble, at least..."

There was a deep-rooted stereotype among demons that masters must be stronger than their subordinates.

If the master was that strong, you'd think the subordinates wouldn't have joined battles, but when you were taking on an enemy, the subordinates had to go up against it first. You might have seen many examples of that in war chronicles and novels.

In addition, even among demons, leviathans were a pretty big deal. People said they were a match for ten thousand human soldiers each.

"If you keep putting in so much effort, I'm sure you'll make progress. I believe in you."

The demon king smiled at me, then left me to my devices.

"Effort... I hope the day comes when my efforts are rewarded, but I dunno..."



When I made the rounds of my sections, I could feel the tension rise slightly.

Hmm. I must have more of a presence now.

It had been about eight months since I became minister of agriculture, and as far as I could tell, I had started to gain recognition in the ministry for the way I worked.

If I keep this up, I may be able to get away with taking a day of paid vacation next week. Or maybe I'll say I caught a cold and spend a day or so just lazing around.

The only problem with that plan was that my mansion was too big, which made it hard to just take it easy. Lazing around in a studio apartment felt more authentic. In a mansion, it might just feel pointless...

"Lady Beelzebub."

As I was thinking about stuff that didn't mean much, I realized

Fatla was right in front of me, waiting. “Wh-what is it...?”

“An urgent job has come in for next week.”

“Urgent, hmm? Well, that’s fine. After all, I’m pretty familiar with almost everything in the ministry by now!”

“No, this is a business trip.”

Ugh... I still wasn’t completely used to business trips. Back when I was a bottom-tier bureaucrat, my job had hardly ever required them.

“It’s an audit. An on-site audit of a fruit farm run by the relative of a Ministry of Agriculture executive who fell from power. The farm and the executive may be colluding with each other.”

“Can’t somebody else handle this?”

“It’s necessary for the head of the Ministry of Agriculture to go in order to show the people that the ministry itself was not a party to the relationship. It is also an order from the demon king.”

Vania came up beside us. “We really should go, boss! Let’s go!”

“Why do you look like you’re having so much fun? Do you plan to sample all the local gourmet cuisine during this business trip? Is it a hobby of yours or something?”

“It’s a fruit farm! We can eat all the fruit we want!”

“You’re treating this too much like an ordinary trip! Besides, there’s no way we’d be able to eat at a place we’re auditing!”

“You might be surprised. You never know until you try!”

Why was she getting all worked up over this...?

Fatla gave Vania a proper scolding later, if you were wondering.



My two secretaries and I headed for the Bellgundeal Fruit Farm.

Fatla had transformed into her true form as a leviathan, an ultra-large flying beast, to carry us there.

“Hell’s bells, this really is a flying ship.”

I was sneaking peeks at the scenery from way up in the sky while I looked over the documents I’d brought along. Vania was helping me.

There were several buildings lined up on top of the leviathan, and we were inside one of them.

“This is the true charm of leviathans, after all. Long ago, we flew freely through the skies, but since there’s a risk of bumping into dragons and other creatures, we have to get permission first now.”

“Life is hard as a leviathan, isn’t it?”

I could never beat something like this. I sighed inwardly.

I’d have to do some absolutely ludicrous training, or it would never work... No, even if I did, there’s no way one person could beat a battleship.

“That’s why my big sister became a bureaucrat, and I followed her

lead and took the test. Once I was out of cooking school, I could have just become a chef, but my sister told me not to. She said I'm not suited to that type of management."

"You went to a cooking school? I see I still know next to nothing about my subordinates."

Just then, something like a shipboard announcement came on.

"Vania, you're only talking about personal matters, and your hands aren't moving. Do your job."

I see... So Fatla was keeping an eye on us even when we were riding on top of her.

"This farm is suspected of aggressively marketing low-quality fruit as high quality and yielding considerable profits. Potential tax evasion has also been indicated."

"That's terrible in several different ways, huh..."

"There were doubts in the past as well, and audits have been conducted twice, but they found no problems on either occasion."

"Doesn't that mean they're innocent, then?"

"You see, there are rumors that the individual who was a Ministry of Agriculture executive at the time interfered, or that someone under the influence of that executive was sent to conduct the audit. This is why you—a former commoner who is not hampered by any of those things—are looking into the matter."

Being called a commoner irritated me a little, but it was the truth.

"Well, I'll take a real thorough look for you, then."

Still, it sounded like the company was under suspicion for quite a few things. *They aren't going to just up and attack us, are they...? Quite a few members of demonkind are still pretty hotheaded. We can't get careless.*

"If it comes down to it, Vania and I swear to protect you, so have no fear."

I guess I'm still weak enough to need protecting.

"Thank you very much for your visit! I am Bellgundeal, proprietor of Bellgundeal Fruit Farm!"

No sooner had we arrived than a one-eyed evil eye demon met us with a smile. There were even employees holding a WELCOME! banner behind him.

"Well, this isn't quite what I was expecting..."

"I'm a little taken aback myself." Even Fatla, who was always cool and collected, was blinking rapidly.

Next to her, Vania was waving cheerfully and saying, "Thank you very much!"

"You must be tired after that long journey. Come make yourselves comfortable in the office first. While you do, we'll prepare the

documents for the audit!”

We were escorted right to the office.

“Say, Fatla, is this how audits generally go? Aren’t they usually more solemn? This is nothing like what I’m familiar with...”

For audits at the Agricultural Policy Organization, we’d only had to go to another institute in the same organization, so there hadn’t been any issues with finding a compromise. But I’d expected a very different experience from an external audit.

“I’m very sorry; I don’t have much experience with audits myself.”

In other words, we were all total amateurs at auditing. Was this really going to be okay?

That said, if nothing turned up, then so much the better.

The important thing was the fact that an audit had taken place.

“This is the office, honored inspectors!”

The space we’d been shown into looked like a glass-walled café with a view into a hothouse garden. The tables and pillars were pure white, and the space was very bright and cheerful. If rooms could be poseurs, this one fit the bill.

“Ooh! This is fascinating! And there are colorful exotic birds in the garden!”

Vania was already in full-blown tourist mode. *Granted, this might be the first time I’ve seen tropical birds. Are these related to parrots?*

“Is this really an office?”

“Yes, we designed it based on data that shows that providing a good environment raises efficiency at work!”

When we dubiously sat down in a seating area that looked suspiciously like a café, another staff member came up and served us fruit juice. “Your beverages.”

“This is fresh-squeezed juice made exclusively from fruit grown at this farm. It isn’t too sweet, and it’s an extremely effective beauty tonic,” Bellgundead the proprietor said, smiling.

“I—I see... Well, I suppose being offered drinks isn’t that odd...” When I tried a little, it was refreshing, and the straightforward sweetness tickled my nose.

This was exquisite.

Fatla and I looked at each other.

“Lady Beelzebub, this juice is the real thing.”

“My thoughts exactly.”

Vania had already drained her glass and requested a refill.

“You should probably learn to hold back a little at times like this...”

“Well, I mean, it’s good for your looks, you know?! I want to drink it while I’ve got the chance!”

She's completely forgotten that we're here for work, I thought, even as I ordered seconds myself. I wish my neighborhood market carried stuff this good.

"W-well, all right... We'll just have to conduct that audit thoroughly..." I dabbed at my mouth with a napkin. No particular problems here.

Just then, the documents for the audit arrived. Most of them were accounting records and the like.

And they came accompanied by an assorted fruitcake set.

"B-Bellgundeal, what on earth...?"

This place actually is a café, isn't it?

"You see, on an audit, you have to look at all those fiddly little numbers one by one, don't you? There's nothing better than sweets for tired minds. If you clear your heads with my company's fruit, I'm sure your work will go more smoothly."

"I—I see. Now that you mention it, perhaps..."

For a second, I thought I heard a voice say, "Talk about easy."

"Did you say something, Bellgundeal?"

"No, nothing, nothing. Good luck with your work."

With my eyes on the documents, I started on the fruitcake.

The first bite was shockingly delicious!

"The pleasant acidity of the oranges harmonizes perfectly with the sweet cake!" I cried.

"The slight dusting of sugar looks like powdery snow!" Vania added.

"Ahhh! Even in the castle town, quality like this isn't available anywhere! I'm so glad I came along on this trip!"

"Lady Beelzebub, Vania, we aren't here to eat cake, you know. This is wonderful... Sinfully delicious..."

All smiles, we somehow managed to get through the first stage of our job, the audit.

We didn't find anything particularly problematic.

When our work reached a stopping point, the evil eye proprietor came back and said, "Would you like to take a tour of the farm as a little diversion?"

"But if that delays the audit, won't it cause trouble for your company as well?"

"No, I thought that having you see for yourselves that our humble establishment grows fruit of good quality could serve as part of the audit. I'd like you to confirm that we do not grow anything low

quality!"

"I—I see... You do have a point."

"Yaaaay! A factory tour! It's a field trip for grown-ups!"

"Vania, curb your enthusiasm. Still...it is intriguing, isn't it?"

Fatla might say otherwise, and it didn't show in her expression, but it was clear that she was enjoying herself, too.

I got the feeling the proprietor said "Seriously easy," but I might have been hearing things.

They ushered us into the hothouse.

"Demon territory is located in the frigid north, so we provide a variety of fruits from southern climes by building greenhouses like this one," the proprietor explained.

The colorful fruits were indeed unmistakably tropical.

"Sister, Sister! A big bird landed on my back!"

"Be a little quieter, would you? But...put it on my back later, please."

So you're letting it ride on you anyway, huh? This seemed to have turned into a sisters' trip. *Bureaucrats are busy, so maybe it's all for the best.*

No... No, that's wrong; this isn't a trip.

"Bellgundead, I think we'd better be getting back to the audit."

"Yes, I understand. In that case, shall we return to the office?"

This time, we were given a very fancy mixed juice, and we checked into their accounting records.

No money was flowing in any particularly opaque directions.

"Even if we are taking breaks, my eyes are getting more and more tired."

Earnest Fatla was the type who focused and worked intently for a short burst. However, not only was the amount of work too great for that this time around, we were currently on a business trip, so her pacing was off.

"I've started to get sleepy..."

"Vania, you are a real piece of work. No sleeping. I mean, fatigue is inevitable for a task like this, and I do understand how you feel, but..."

I nearly yawned, too, but I fought the urge desperately. As a bottom-tier employee, I'd spent a long time doing dull work, so I still had a tolerance for it. That said, whether I could handle it or not and whether it was interesting or not were completely different things.

Even so, if I fell asleep during an audit, it would embarrass the entire Ministry of Agriculture.

C'mon, tough it out, tough it out...

That was when Bellgundeal the evil eye came by again.

“You seem fatigued. Our company has female staff members who give beauty treatments. Would you like one?”

For a moment, I almost broke into a smile, but I managed to bite it back. “Hrm... A kind offer indeed, but wouldn’t that count as entertaining us?”

“It wouldn’t do to have your concentration lapse and cause you to overlook something. I believe it would be best to clear your bodies of any metabolic waste, then begin your work again in a refreshed state of mind.”

Hmm. I’m beginning to feel as if I’m being cleverly manipulated. If I don’t shut this down now, we may not be able to go back...

“That’s a valid way of looking at it. May we take you up on that offer?” Fatla nodded. She should have been more hard-nosed than that!

No, let’s look at this from another angle. If Fatla’s saying it’s okay, doesn’t that mean there’s no problem?

“All right. In that case, yes, please let us try this beauty treatment of yours.”

I got the feeling the proprietor smirked, but that was probably also my imagination.

The beauty treatment was, in a word, heaven.

It’s a bit weird for a demon to be talking about heaven, but it really felt that good. A piping-hot towel was placed over my eyes, and I dozed through the whole treatment.

My body definitely felt lighter, and my face seemed more delicate than before.

“Boss, you look incredibly cute now!”

“Vania, flattery will get you nowhere. But I will admit your skin looks younger as well.”

“If it weren’t for work fatigue, would I be more attractive...?”

In the end, all three of us were satisfied in three different ways.

Back when I was a bottom-tier bureaucrat, beauty treatments like this one were barely even an option. Although that was because I’d use that money to buy cheap liquor and beer snacks, then drink at home. I never knew such happiness existed...

While we were checking documents again, feeling rejuvenated, night fell.

“Nnnnnn! I think that’s it for work today! We’ll get through the rest tomorrow morning!” Vania stretched.

Yes, it was about time to call it a day.

“All right, let’s get something to eat,” I said. “We obviously can’t let the group we’re auditing invite us out, so we’ll go somewhere else.”

There weren’t many places around, and we went into a slightly trendy restaurant.

If you let the group you’re auditing entertain you too warmly, the audit doesn’t work. We might have gotten a little too cozy today. *I’ll let those regrets remind me to keep a clear head tomorrow...*

However, even there, something peculiar happened.

We kept receiving dishes that were clearly more luxurious than what we’d asked for.

“How odd... Did we order a full-course meal like this?”

“If it was not you, Vania, we must not have.” I thought it was strange, and I asked a staff member if there’d been some mistake.

“Oh... As a matter of fact, it just so happens that you’re our five-thousandth party of customers, so we’re serving you a special full-course meal for no additional charge,” the staff member said, averting his eyes awkwardly.

The hallmark of a guilty conscience.

I was positive.

No matter how you looked at it, this was weird.

Meanwhile, Vania was pleasantly drunk, and Fatla had eaten too much and was holding her stomach in pain.

These two won’t be any more use today...



That evening, after the three of us had checked into the inn, I went back to the farm by myself and grilled the employees who were there working overtime.

“Is the proprietor still here?”

“No, I believe he’s already gone home... If you need him, please try again tomorrow.”

I grinned.

Yes—when the proprietor isn’t here, the place is vulnerable.

“No matter if he’s not here. Earlier, they brought the documents for the audit to us; could you show me to the vault where those documents were originally?”

“Huh?! You mean right now?!”

“There’s no rule that says audits can’t be conducted at night.

Hurry up and open it. It's nothing important; I only have the urge to check the ones that weren't there earlier. A personal interest, you understand. That is why I'm here by myself."

With no other options, the employee opened the vault.

I carefully checked through the accounting records for the period that I'd wondered about, working by the light of a small hand lantern.

We'd been entertained far too well.

There had to be something to find.

And after about fifteen minutes—

I pinpointed a stream of capital that was clearly anomalous.

"The company's positively gushing money, and I can't tell what it was used on, either."

Just then, a figure appeared in the vault.

It was Bellgundeal, the evil eye proprietor.

"Minister of Agriculture. How dedicated you are to be working at an hour like this. With your status, you shouldn't need to do such a dull task."

I sensed a hint of sarcasm.

"Hmph! I am a new noble who got promoted all of a sudden. I spent forever doing accounting. I've gone over the same books again and again because they were off by less than the cost of a meal. When something's fishy somewhere, I can feel it."

"And did you?"

"We'll still have to do a detailed investigation, but it's almost certain that you've been conducting financial transactions under the table with that Ministry of Agriculture relative of yours and having them grease some wheels for you. You may also have been falsifying production areas and using goods that are past their sell-by dates, but everything from here on out is a job for the lot from the audit bureau and the police."

"So you've finally tracked it down, have you?"

Bellgundeal was holding something. A blunt instrument? Was he planning to strike me down here?

I tensed up. *I may not look it, but I'm still a demon minister. I'd never lose to a mere evil eye!*

However, while the object could have been used as a bludgeon, that wasn't what Bellgundeal did with it.

"I don't suppose we could settle the matter with this?"

What Bellgundeal the evil eye held out to me was—

A pyramid-shaped stack of gold ingots!

"Mistress Beelzebub—Ah, forgive me. As you are a noble, perhaps I should call you Lady Beelzebub. You have only just been elevated to the nobility. You have no economic foundation whatsoever. This farm can create that foundation for you."

“Do you intend to bribe me with this?” I glared at the evil eye.

“To be honest, you have my sympathies. With no backer to support you, even if you’ve been given a position as minister of agriculture, there are any number of opposing forces, and should you prove inconvenient, you might be cut off at any time. You could conceivably be hounded out of your current rank next year, or the year after that. Should you not at least have savings to use in your retirement?”

“On its own, that’s a sound argument. I’m like an insignificant little fly.”

Slowly, I approached the pile of ingots.

“That’s right. Come, prosper along with this farm!”

And then—

I swept my right hand through those gold ingots and sent them flying.

“But don’t take me for a fool! While I love fruit that’s nearly rotten, I have no intention of fraternizing with such rotten characters! What you just said is so filthy that I want to wash out my ears; go get me some cold water!”

The evil eye’s expression abruptly hardened. His hand tightened around a gold ingot.

“I’ll teach you to push your luck, you upstart commoner! You’ll die here!”

The evil eye brandished the ingot—which I suppose *could* serve as a bludgeon!

Not good! My Ice and Snow spell wasn’t going to make it in time!

I managed to dodge the first attack somehow, but this really wasn’t a good environment for fighting.

“It’s too cramped in here! I can’t even draw a magic circle!”

“Exactly! All right. Now suffer!” Slowly, the evil eye closed in on me.

What do I do? Should I take a risk and close the distance? No, I’ll get hit before I can manage it... There’s no room to take flight...

However, before he could slam that gold ingot into me—

The man slowly tipped forward and collapsed.

Behind him were the two leviathan sisters.

“Lady Beelzebub, we really can’t have you going off on your own like this.”

“My, that was a close one, wasn’t it?! Still, all’s well that ends well, huh!”

“Fatla? Vania?!”

Vania nodded happily. “When your serious-minded boss

disappears, work is the first place you look.”

The relief made my legs give out on me, and I sat down right where I was.

Fatla picked me up and put my arm around her shoulders.

After the wave of relief passed, I started feeling pathetic. *Even though I'm a demon minister, I'm seriously weak.*

“I’m sorry... For a demon, I’m still not that powerful. I really am no match for you two leviathans. I’m not living up to the Beelzebub name...”

“Don’t get the wrong idea, please.” Fatla sounded a little snuffy. “I serve the Lady Beelzebub who devotes herself to her official business as minister of agriculture. I am not groveling because of your strength.”

“We’ll support you when you can’t manage on your own, Lady Beelzebub!”

“You have my gratitude, both of you. Thank you...”

Uncharacteristically, I was crying.

As a result of the audit, quite a few arrests were made. I can’t say this on the record, but it served them all right. Demonkind may last forever, but evil will always fail.



Several months later—

“Hah! Hiyah!”

—I was sparring with Fatla and Vania.

We were starting with special training to boost the power of my punches and kicks.

I'm the minister of agriculture, and I'm going to get to midlevel boss-class strength if it's the last thing I do!

“You’re doing well, Lady Beelzebub.” Fatla, who was receiving my attacks, encouraged me with compliments. “At this point, you have power on the level of a Ministry of Agriculture section chief.”

“I’m still at section chief level, huh? This is going to take a while.” I got close to feeling discouraged, but I didn’t give up. As if I’d ever give up.

“No—no, boss, you’re strong! If there were three of you, I’d lose.”

“That prerequisite makes no sense! I don’t turn up in groups of three!”

Vania’s method of praising me was a little strange.

“But remember that nasty evil eye from earlier?” Vania continued. “You could beat him easily now.”

I stopped attacking. "Is that the truth?"

"I'll swear to it as well. You really are stronger, Lady Beelzebub." Since Fatla had said it, it probably was true.

Great. I'm going to keep on getting stronger. I'll become an outstanding minister of agriculture. I won't lose to anybody.

Huh...? When had I set my sights on that particular goal? As a bottom-tier bureaucrat, I'm pretty sure I was an idler...

At that point, the demon king passed by under her parasol again.

We stopped practicing and saluted briskly.

"A very good morning to you, ma'am, Your Majesty," I said.

Smiling, the demon king came up to me. I got the feeling she was plotting something again.

"Miss Beelzebub, this is an order. Would you bow your head there for a moment?" she said, still smiling. Did she mean I was acting too proud? Either way, it was an order, so I couldn't refuse.

"...All right, ma'am, Your Majesty." I bent forward, inclining my upper body.

"Very well done. ♪"

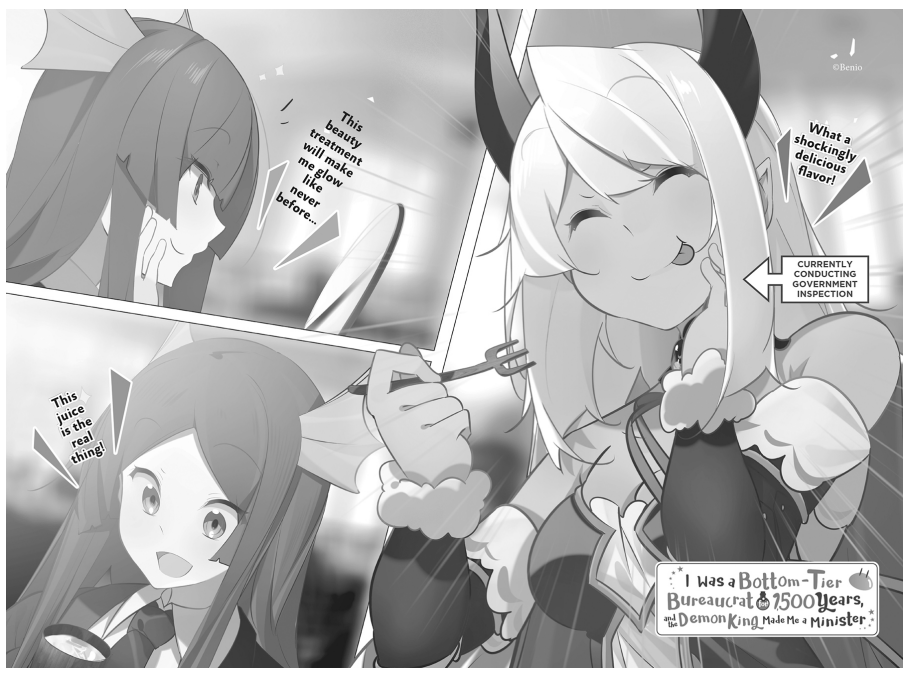
The demon king stretched out a hand—

And patted me on the head.

"Your Majesty...?"

"Yes, very good. If you keep putting in that kind of effort, I'm sure you'll make progress. After all, Miss Beelzebub, I've placed my confidence in you." The demon king giggled, smiling impishly despite her status. "I need you to get stronger and become my right-hand demon."





This bestiry treatment will make me glow like never before...

What a shockingly delicious flavor!

CURRENTLY CONDUCTING GOVERNMENT INSPECTION

This juice is the real thing!

I was a Bottom-Tier Bureaucrat & 1500 Years, The Demon King Made Me a Minister.

Then she shifted the angle of her parasol slightly and departed.
It didn't make much sense to me, and I cocked my head.

"Lady Beelzebub, has the demon king taken a liking to you?" Fatla asked.

"Frankly, it's a mystery. I don't know her all that well."

"She may have recognized your potential from the very beginning."

Potential, huh?

It would be nice to have, but even if I don't, it won't change what I'm doing.

"All right, let's keep going! I'll be as strong as a chief director by the end of the month!"



I Gathered Plants with Her Majesty

The town surrounding Vanzeld Castle and the area around the town did not get much rain. When it did get rain, it was little more than a mist.

But the misty rain clung to me when I went out for a jog, relieving the heat of exercise at the most perfect rate.

“How comfortable~ I feel like I’m going a little faster than usual~”

I had added a morning run to my daily routine, so I was not tired.

I would be an exemplary demon; no one would dare mock me!

Then I caught sight of the demon king going for a walk. She did not have her typical parasol, but a normal umbrella.

I dropped to my knees before her; it would be inexcusable to ignore her.

“Oh my; the road is all wet. There is no need to do that~”

Her Majesty reached out to hold the umbrella over me.

“No, I cannot allow myself to neglect my manners.”

“Oh, you are much too formal, Miss Beelzebub. Well, I suppose that is one of the things I like about you.”

Her Majesty was smiling as she always was, but to be honest, I was not exactly sure what she was thinking. I had learned that those who smile the most are often the most terrifying within. I mustn’t let my guard down.

Fewer and fewer demons had dared to scorn her as of late. Even other ministers were rather nervous around her.

For me, making light of her had never been an option. I had no faction backing me. While other ministers had entire armies at their disposal, I was alone. At best, I had Fatla and Vania with me.

That was why, when I met the demon king, I erred on the side of caution...

We often crossed paths, so perhaps it was still a little easier compared with when I first became minister, though.

“I would have been powerless had you not pulled me up, Your Majesty. I have no choice but to obey you. Thank you for all you have

done for me.”

I suppose that's enough.

“Oh-ho, you have no choice but to obey me? I see~ ♪”

Her Majesty chuckled, and the smile she wore now was not the same as the one from before.

Oh dear, I may have made a slip of the tongue...

“Then why don't you accompany me all day today? I was just searching for someone knowledgeable in the agricultural sector.”

“Well, I must be heading to work at—”

“And the demon king's orders have now canceled your work. ♪ I will give Miss Fatla the power to make final decisions in your place~ ♪”

She was taking this much further than I'd expected!

I should have been more careful in my choice of expression... Of course she would take advantage of my pledge to obey her...

But what I'd said was true; I *did* have no choice. She was the demon king, after all.

“Then I will make arrangements to give you the day off, Miss Beelzebub.” She pointed to a gazebo not too far from us. “Take shelter from the rain there. I'll be right back. ♪”

“Ah, but I don't know what—”

“You don't need to know anything. ♪”

Her Majesty had already started skipping off toward the castle.

I did not know what exactly was going to happen, but I knew for a fact that it would be trouble.



As I sat staring off into space in the gazebo, the demon king returned.

“I am sorry to keep you waiting. Now, let us be off!” With a dramatic flourish, Her Majesty raised her right hand.

“Be off to where? No, first, I'd like to know the reason behind all this.”

I had been given almost no information beforehand, so I was nervous.

“You know there is an herb garden on castle grounds, don't you? I'm searching for a plant to cultivate there.”

Her reason was more respectable than I'd imagined.

The herb garden was beside the castle's regular garden, which was a facility some would call a botanical garden with a farm added to it.

The castle was large, so if we ever found ourselves in a siege, we would need food. The plants growing in the herb garden were vegetables we could harvest during a crisis.

In addition, there were also plants that proved to be good poisons,

should the need ever arise for that.

Of course, many of us simply saw it as a botanical garden, so most of the demons who worked in the castle treated it that way.

Now, since the herb garden fell under the Ministry of Agriculture's jurisdiction, I had no choice but to go. It made sense.

However, everything in the castle itself belonged to the demon king, so anything she wanted to plant would be prioritized. The normal garden was more like something she managed as a hobby.

"If I may ask, what sort of plant are you looking for?"

"Before I answer thaaaat... Pop quiz!"

Was this a test for her vassal...?

"Please name as many plants growing in the herb garden as possible! Ready, go!"

"What? Demon carrot, demon onion, northern thick-shell beans, tundra wheat, tundra barley, demon capsicum, monster capsicum, demon eggplant—"

I was surprised by the suddenness of it, but I listed one plant name after another. I omitted many of the finer subvarieties, such as the large, small, red, and other types of demon eggplant we bred, because otherwise, I would never finish.

Of course, the poisonous herbs were not used in cooking, so I knew little more than the names of those.

After a while, the demon king started to clap.

"Amazing! You know so many! I thought you might even be a researcher working in the herb garden!"

"When I became the minister of agriculture, I made sure to memorize what I would need to know, you see."

I did not mind the compliment—though, of course, I was not a plant enthusiast. I didn't even pay attention to what sort of capsicums or spices they used in the hell spaghetti at the restaurant I frequented.

By the way, I've heard that the demon lands used to be too cold for capsicums to grow. They were brought from another faraway land, modified, then grown here.

Though I was the daughter of greengrocers, there were quite a few vegetables in the herb garden that I had never seen before. It was a bit of a shock.

But since I was now at the top of the Ministry of Agriculture, there was much I needed to know. That was why I had memorized every plant in the herb garden.

At the time, the task had felt rather pointless, considering they would not appear on a test or anything...so I never thought I would *actually* be tested on them. One never knows how fortune might favor them.

"Yes, you're such a hard worker, Miss Beelzebub. You truly

deserve praise for your efforts. I do love that about you. ♪”

I didn’t know what to make of that last bit, but if she was praising me, then I suppose it was all right to be happy about it.

“Now that I know how skilled you are, let us be off. ♪”

Her Majesty turned to face the gazebo exit and opened her umbrella.

“Wait, Your Majesty, where are we going?”

I knew all the places we could get to from Vanzeld Castle. There were scarcely more than farms in the outskirts of the city, but that would be a bit of a journey.

“You’ll find out if you follow me.”

The demon king grabbed my hand.

I reminded myself I had no choice but to obey her.



The demon king brought me to...

...a corridor in the castle’s fifth-floor basement. I scarcely ever came down here, as I rarely had any reason to.

“It is so spacious under the castle...”

The corridor stretched forward, and at regular intervals along the walls sat candles, as though someone had been taking care of the place.

That said, it was eerie.

“Yes. Those working in the ministry and the government office buildings don’t appear to be aware of this area’s existence. Even if they were, it seems hardly anyone knows the proper routes down here.”

The demon king was still grasping my hand. I had a feeling our positions should be reversed, but as this was my first time seeing this place, I could not act as the escort here.

“This castle was built only to prevent an enemy attack, after all~ It’s one big maze!”

“I see... Ah yes, the castle is a dungeon, isn’t it...?”

I was astonished. How long had it taken to build such a large structure? How much did it cost?

Uh-oh... Perhaps it would be best if I did not think of the budget right now.

My job may have made me far too conscious of money issues...

“One of the previous demon kings was a little crazy for architecture~ The design of this place is so complicated, one might easily lose their way!”

“Indeed, I no longer know where I am anymore... Hmm?”

I realized there was a fundamental question I should have been

asking.

“We can wander about underground, but no plants grow down here, do they? Unless there is some especially valuable mold you’re after?”

“You’re right; they don’t grow down here~ ♪”

I could see the question mark in my mind.

Then where is she taking me...?

But the answer practically leaped out at me.

“Um, I believe it was around here~” Her Majesty opened a door, and I saw a glittering light on the other side.

A magic circle drawn on the ground was glowing.

“...I suppose this is for transportation...?”

“How perceptive of you! Yes, we will be warping! Here we go!”

Her Majesty tugged on my hand even harder, pulling me into the magic circle.



When we arrived, a forest of tall pine trees spread as far as the eye could see, and the ground was covered in a thin frost.

“Augh! It’s so cold... I should have worn a coat...!”

I hugged myself instinctively. The temperature was so much colder here compared with the town around the castle!

“Oh, come now~ Don’t let go of my hand. I believe you can endure the cold and stay linked with me at the same time.” I gave my hand back to her. Ah, it had been so cold, I’d let go...

“Still, to think we could reach this place from the castle... I had no idea...”

“It is top secret, after all. In fact, we’ve secured routes to all sorts of locations~”

This was highly classified information—but I was a minister, so it wasn’t bad for me to know.

“Look at the base of the pines. See the mushrooms growing there, breaking through the ice and living out here in the cold? Those are what I’m here to collect.”

Just as she said, there were mushrooms and other grasses peeking out from the ice, clinging fast to the tree. Her Majesty plucked them and put them in the cloth bag she had brought with her.

“Ahhh, now this feels like agricultural work.”

“Of course. This is proper work, you know. We’re not here to play.”

I honestly thought this was another one of Her Majesty’s jokes, but she was taking it surprisingly seriously.

That said, it was still much too cold...

And then came a freezing gust of wind! *There's frost in my hair...*

"I can stand this no longer! Let us return!"

"What? But this is nothing." Her Majesty seemed entirely unaffected. She did not even seem to be putting on a brave front.

So this was Her Majesty's true power... It was an odd way to discover how outmatched I was.

"You seem to be in pain, so I suppose we can move on to the next area."

"The next area?" I had a terrible feeling about this.

"Yes! ♪ Let's return to the castle via magic circle, then we'll warp to another place with a different teleportation circle."

"What is the next place like...?" I had to ask before I could feel better about it.

"It's not cold at all! I can guarantee that!"

Then, after leaping into a magic circle in a creepy and deep part of the castle underground—

—we came to a thick, dense forest.

The trees were not all that tall, and all of them had ivy wrapped tightly around them.

"Tis not cold at all, no. But it is a damp, uncomfortable heat..."

"We might find delicious nuts here, no? Let us get to looking!"

Compared with that horridly frigid place, it might be worth searching around here.

Planting them as is in the castle's herb garden might cause them to die due to the difference in climate, but we could manage through selective breeding.

Her Majesty dragged me deeper and deeper into the forest. Her initiative was impressive, and this was much better than staying cooped up in the castle.

But I felt some pressure on my stomach.

I looked down and saw that a snake as thick as a rope was coiling around me.

"Your Majesty, stop, stop! We have a big snake problem!"

"Oh~ That one isn't venomous, so there's no need to panic. It's simply trying to suffocate you."

"Then I have every reason to panic! I cannot... Hrgh—!"

Pain coursed through my body.

"Relax, Miss Beelzebub."

"If I relax, I'll die!"

"I doubt you're weaker than a little snake. Can't you simply pull it off you?"

I snapped back to reality when she said that. Indeed—I had been training. It would take more than a snake to defeat me!

“Rrrrrrrgh!”

I grabbed the snake and pulled!

“Rrrrrgrah! Do not underestimate a demon! You’re nothing but a common reptile!”

All of a sudden, just as I could feel its grip on me loosening, the snake let go and began to wriggle. It seemed to recognize that it would be in danger if it didn’t.

“Now don’t cause any more trouble.” I tossed it to the ground, and the snake escaped into the brush.

“Yes, yes! Of course you wouldn’t lose to a snake! ♪ Let us continue~ ♪” Her Majesty pulled on my hand again.

“Understood... I shall follow you anywhere...”

“Music to my ears.”

Oh...

Another slip of the tongue. *I keep creating opportunities for her like this. Or perhaps this is a sign that I still have much to learn?*

We encountered more snakes later, but I kicked them all to the side. Literally. I kicked them, and they squirmed away. They knew I was not to be their prey.

Every single time, the demon king complimented me (“What good form on that kick~ ♪”), so I suppose it wasn’t so bad.

“By the way, Your Majesty, I have not seen any snakes attack you yet; are you wearing snake repellent or something?”

If so, then she should have told me. I would have to protect her if she got attacked, but if such a convenient item existed, I wanted to use it, too.

“Ah~ For some reason, the snakes are avoiding me~”

Ah, the theory that animals instinctively know who is most powerful!

That meant the snakes were approaching me because they felt there was a chance they could defeat me. The idea upset me a little, so I decided to proactively attack a snake whenever I saw one.

“Where are you, where are you?! I will rip you in half, fry you, and eat you! I hear snakes taste delicious, and I’m *dying* to try one!”

“That’s a bit much, Miss Beelzebub. Please mind yourself.”

Her Majesty had been unusually serious on this outing.

“Y-yes, ma’am...”

I wasn’t entirely sure of why, but something I did must have offended her.

“Do you understand? You serve me, but you are also older than me. I want you to follow me faithfully as a minister while maintaining the image of an elder sister. You are my escort, so please do not forget to act like one.”

“I see what you are saying, but you have been the one pulling my

hand, Your Majesty, so when it comes to the question of who is escorting whom—”

“You absolutely must think more of yourself as my elder sister, as older than me! You need heart, I say!”

Her Majesty placed her hand atop her heart. It seemed everyone had their line in the sand.

We managed to collect all sorts of plants from the thick forest, so it was apt to say the trip was a success, but—

“My whole body itches...”

“I see the mosquitoes have made a feast of you~”

I had been the prey of a horrible number of mosquitoes.

“Are you all right, Your Majesty?”

“Strangely enough, they haven’t come to me at all~ ♪”

Even the mosquitoes knew she was powerful!



Afterward, we used the teleportation circle again and arrived in a strange land.

The third location was a small piece of flat land atop a cliff.

“Argh! I’m so tense; how terrifying!”

“Oh, you can fly, so no need to worry. In fact, I’d say this view alone is well worth the trip~”

Her Majesty was calm and relaxed, perhaps because she always knew where we were going to warp to.

“I see that, but why have we come here...? Are you sure there are any plants—?”

“There’s a legendary flower here! It can only save one’s gravely ill childhood friend!”

“Why is it limited to saving childhood friends?”

I relaxed when I spotted the few pretty, blooming yellow flowers, however—and then I saw a hand reach up over the cliff’s edge!

But the answer to that mystery came quickly. A young human man had climbed all the way up here.

Which meant we were in the human lands.

“Oh, what a coincidence it is to see someone else here~ Hello~”

Her Majesty greeted the man as though they were passing each other in the street as she pulled up the yellow flowers, root and all. She was going to plant them in the herb garden.

There were only a few flowers, and now they were all gone.

“Aaah! Now I won’t be able to save my gravely ill childhood friend!”

What a dramatic plot twist!

“Aww~ But I believe this is finders keepers, as they say~ There

are other cliffs, so why don't you go and climb those~?"

"Give it to him, Your Majesty! It wouldn't hurt to give him one!"

I had a feeling that we were in the wrong here!

"Then why don't we do this? If this man can defeat me in a fight, then I shall give him—"

"You're only pretending to give him a chance; that's even worse!"

There was no human who could defeat the demon king!

I negotiated and managed to secure one flower for the human man.

"Thank you very much, angels. Now I will be able to save my childhood friend, my love!" The man thanked us.

"We are not angels, but...w-well, I suppose we are similar..."

"They say no one returns alive from climbing this cliff, but because of your help, I should be able to take this flower back! Thank you so much!"

The man, touched, climbed down the cliff with tears streaming down his face, an endeavor which was quite unsafe.

"Your Majesty, he said any human who came here never returned. Could that mean...?"

I dropped my gaze to the magic circle.

"Ah~ Some humans stepped into the magic circle and exited into the castle underground. We were at war with them before, and I hear we did not let them go home back then."

From a human point of view, it was essentially a one-way portal...

The next place we came to was a desert. The sand was hot underfoot.

"If the magic circle gets covered in sand, then we'll simply come out on top of it~"

There was a mound of sand beneath our feet, so the magic circle was likely below it all.

"I see. Unlike the previous locations, I cannot see the magic circle at all."

"Miss Beelzebub, will you please clear away the sand so we can get home?"

"This is pure pain!"

It was awful... No matter how much sand I dug up, more would simply flow in from the sides...

"I will be at this forever... Forever..."

"Oh, you can do it~ Do it for your younger sister~ ♪"

"I may be doing this for the demon king, but it is still painful..."

I let my mind wander, and eventually, I had dug up the sand-covered magic circle.

The demon king had vanished, but she did return with all sorts of

plants. I did not know where she could possibly have acquired them.



Again, the demon king and I stood before a magic circle within the castle.

It was deep, deep underground.

We had walked down so many flights of stairs that I no longer remembered what floor we were on.

“This will be our last one today~”

“Finally, the end...” I lightly smacked my cheeks to perk myself up.

I could get through this so long as I remembered that this was the last place. No matter where we ended up, it was unlikely that we would die. It would simply be an inconvenience.

Once again, Her Majesty held my hand, and we hopped into the teleportation circle.

We moved in an instant—

—and my lungs filled with water!

I began to choke.

We were under the sea! I could see light filtering through the water, so we weren’t terribly deep, but this was grueling torture!

On the other hand, Her Majesty floated beside me, leisurely picking marine plants.

Oh no! Those will not grow if you plant them in the herb garden!

“Mlab Beelbebeub, blobelbulubulelbueubueb?”

She said something to me with a smile, but I could not hear what she said.

Then I sensed bloodthirst.

A shark was approaching us!

Ha, so what?! I would never lose to a shark!

I aimed a punch toward its head.

Thunk.

Oh no. We were in the water, so my punch didn’t pack much of a...well, punch.

Our situation had taken a turn for the worse...

The shark opened its jaws.

I moved to swim away—and I would have succeeded, if it weren’t for the demon king’s hand still grasping mine!

“Blorowub Abababwuebee, bwaaaababababublbb!”

Your Majesty, shark! was what I meant to say, but I doubted she understood... She was still plucking marine plants!

What should I do? Should I risk my life to save Her Majesty?

...I had no choice.

It was a retainer's job, and I had said it myself anyway.

I would obey the demon king. I must take responsibility for my own words. A minister could do no less.

I came to float before the shark.

Come on, bite me! I doubt I taste very good! If you get food poisoning, you're on your own!

The shark widened its maw.

But at that very moment—

—something that looked like a black mist swirled around the shark, and it simply turned up its belly and began to float away.

Her Majesty had cast a spell, and her face seemed quite satisfied.



The first thing I did upon returning to the castle was take a deep breath. Air had never tasted so good...

"I cast a spell on the shark that sapped its strength. It didn't stand a chance."

"That tells me that being underwater is nothing to you, Your Majesty."

I was once again reminded of the demon king's incredible power.

"That may be true, but I am so happy."

The demon king approached me and embraced me, lightly patting me on the back.

She and I had just returned from the ocean, so we were both soaking wet, but she felt much warmer than me.

"You put my safety above yours."

"Well... I am your vassal..."

"You pass," she said and let go of me.

"I pass? Pass what?"

"Miss Beelzebub, I have high hopes for you. I hope to bring out more of your best in the future. ♪" Her Majesty smiled, avoiding my question. "But through our activities today, your weaknesses have come to light. I hope you work on correcting those."

At some point, this had turned into a performance review.

"When you say 'weaknesses,' are you referring to when we were underwater?"

I hadn't known how to face the shark. The castle and the town didn't give me many opportunities to fight them, after all.

"Miss Beelzebub, have you ever gone sightseeing before?"

"Rarely," I answered instantly.

I had lived for a long time in the town around Vanzeld Castle, but I spent my weekends exclusively lying around.

"I thought so~ You strike me as rather narrow-minded." Her

Majesty gave a dramatic sigh. “That is why I wanted you to see and experience many different places personally. You must develop that part of yourself in order to be a minister, after all~”

I was startled.

“A minister cannot simply be strong...”

One needed strong intuition and farsightedness. Someone who only ever looked at documents in her office, only ever jogged around the castle moat, and never left the city during her days off was hardly suited to be the minister of agriculture. A solid grasp on the nature and climate of places all around the world was essential to the job.

I suppose that was what Her Majesty was trying to teach me.

“Thank you very much, Your Majesty! My eyes have been opened!”

“Aww, Miss Beelzebub, teasing you is so worth it~”

“What do you mean by that?!” I could not let that one slip by!

“Exactly what I said. You take everything at face value, so I’m always amused by our interactions.”

I wonder if she had simply been toying with me the whole day...

“Well, I hope for more good things in the future. ♪”

The demon king smiled gleefully. She seemed more delighted than I thought she would be.

Perhaps a minister should also take care not to be tricked by something that only sounds believable...



In the days that followed, I diligently went jogging.

Also, to the surprise of no one, the marine plants that the demon king had procured from the ocean now sat brittle and dry in the dirt.

The reason I knew that was because I’d changed my jogging course to go *through the herb garden*.

I was the minister of agriculture, so it would be a good idea to check on the growing plants as part of my morning routine.

There was also something else that caught my eye.

The flower said only to grow at the top of cliffs, the one that could save one’s gravely ill childhood friend—it was flourishing in the herb garden!

“It does not just grow atop cliffs! The climate simply did not agree with it elsewhere!”

Eventually, the flower might become a widely used medicinal herb in the demon lands.



I Crushed a Recalcitrant Noble

“—And that concludes my report as minister of agriculture,” I said with a triumphant look, then sat down.

I was right in the middle of a ministers’ meeting in the presence of Her Majesty. You could call this the very heart of demon politics.

The other ministers were whispering among themselves.

“What an admirable response.”

“You’d never think she was self-made now.”

Good, good, gimme more of that.

I’d been minister of agriculture for several years at that point, and it felt like I was completely used to my rank.

“Thank you, Miss Beelzebub. I wouldn’t be ashamed to introduce you as my minister anywhere now.” Beaming, the demon king complimented me as well.

“No, no, it’s all because your virtues cover the whole of the demon world, Your Majesty.”

It was a standard expression, but I praised the demon king right back.

Right now, I was shining more brightly than I ever had in my life. I was performing my duties brilliantly, and I’d been blessed with good subordinates.

Vania bungled things pretty frequently, but we handled it.

I was actually even interviewed by a girls’ magazine the other day for a feature titled “Five Demon Women Who Are Flying High.”

They sent me a sample copy, but I personally bought about ten of ’em and gave copies to Fatla and Vania, too. Fatla told me, “It’s far too obvious that you’re boasting,” but I don’t think that’s really a problem.

The demon king was in that same magazine, in fact. She’s still young, and she’s governing demonkind with a steady hand. Of course she’d get into print.

“My virtues, hmm? Unfortunately, there’s one place where that isn’t necessarily the case.” The demon king gave an affected-sounding sigh.

On the whole, she tended to ham it up, but the demon kings have

had a penchant for drama for generations. Maybe it ran in her blood.

“You know, when I engage in politics, people and factions gain my support, which means that no matter what I do, someone’s rights, interests, and power must suffer. Inevitably, there are complaints from those quarters.”

“Outrageous! We cannot let them get away with opposing you, Your Majesty.”

I could give socially acceptable responses quickly now, too. I was not nervous like I was back when I first took up my post.

The other ministers followed suit.

“Precisely.”

“Let us show those demons hell.”

“Thank you, all of you. As it happens, I’m having difficulties with a certain area that has fallen behind on its tax payments. The lord of that territory says this is unavoidable due to a poor harvest, but I strongly suspect it may be a gesture of defiance against me.”

Saying you couldn’t pay your taxes because your harvest was bad, and that you just wouldn’t be able to manage unless you got a discount, was the oldest trick in the book.

“What do you think, Miss Beelzebub?”

“They must pay! If they say the harvest was poor, then I’d recommend dispatching a supervisor and seeing what things are actually like over there.”

“Yes, you’re right.”

Then the demon king smiled.

For some reason, a chill ran through me.

“The area that hasn’t paid its taxes is the domain of Lord Nastoya the alraune.”

Hmm? I feel like I’ve heard that name somewhere before...

“He once held power in the Ministry of Agriculture and was favored to be its next minister, but he lost his position due to graft.”

Curses! This had everything to do with me!

“Since it just happens to be an issue with a formerly influential person in the Ministry of Agriculture, Miss Beelzebub, can I ask you to go?”

At this point, I suppose I can’t refuse.

“Yes, ma’am, Your Majesty...”

All I could do was nod my head.



“Lady Beelzebub, this is a terribly alarming situation.”

When I returned to my minister’s chamber, I was met by Fatla’s reproachful eyes.

“Lord Nastoya the alraune is the great noble who was expected to become minister of agriculture upon the ascension of the new demon king, but he was instead cross-examined regarding corruption and ended up retreating into his domain. And now the new minister of agriculture will walk in. He will take it as spite... *Sigh.*”

“Oh, so this really is headed in an unpleasant direction?”

“You may not come back alive. I mean it. Even if he is an alraune, Lord Nastoya is an ultra-high-level demon.”

If you were wondering what an alraune is, they are a sort of plant spirit. Strictly speaking, you can’t call them demons, but demons are extremely lax when it comes to drawing lines like that. We may have wings, or horns, or tails, or one eye, or maybe three—there are too many differences when it comes to those things, so we don’t sweat the small stuff.

Vania was shaking harder than I was. “No! I don’t want to! The food in alraune territory isn’t even good! It’s all just weeds!”

“Why are you worried about *that*?!”

“People who live in territories with bad food are peculiarly stoic and narrow-minded! Lord Nastoya and his hangers-on were so unpleasant to be around. They were extremely picky about little things, too!”

*The views expressed here are those of the characters. Well, just Vania, really.

“Still, if an executive from the Ministry of Agriculture is causing trouble back in his territory, as the current head of the ministry, I expect I’m the one who should go and resolve it.”

“There are tax collectors, aren’t there?” Vania protested. “I’m pretty sure the group was made up of top necromancers and things. Let’s ask them to handle it, okay?”

“Apparently, the tax collectors all oh-so-conveniently caught the flu, and they can’t go.”

“In other words, a conspiracy. They’re trying to shove an unpleasant job off onto you!”

“Now, calm down; just settle down. Even alraunes won’t grab you and eat you. They’re demons, too.”

“That’s why I’m worried! If they were humans and they attacked, we’d be able to take them out instead, but demons are scary! I mean it!”

She’s a leviathan; why is she this jumpy?

“Anyway, we’re going. It’s a simple job. We’ll just tell him to pay

his taxes, and that'll be the end of it. We'll leave next week."

"You know, that just happens to be the day my stomach always hurts, so I won't be able to g—"

"Do you take me for a fool?" I hit the side of Vania's head with a noogie attack.

"Hey! This is assault! This is blatant workplace violence!"

"So says Vania. What say you, Fatla?"

"I see nothing. It just happens to be the day when I can't see my little sister." Fatla summarily took my side.

Apparently, my loyal secretary would choose to side with her boss rather than her sister.

"I'll go... I'll go, so please stopppp!"

And so we ended up going to see Lord Nastoya the alraune.



Vania assumed her true, enormous leviathan shape, and we rode on her back to alraune territory.

In a way, it was a job that showed off her abilities as a leviathan, something that could boost her reputation.

However, there was a rather sizable problem.

"There's too much rocking going on..."

The cup I'd been about to drink from flew toward the wall of the room, along with the table, as Vania tilted again.

"I'm sorry. My sister is a bad pilot."

Fatla was standing there as if it was nothing. *She must be used to this*, I thought, until I saw that she was holding on to a ring that hung from the ceiling.

"What's that thing you've got there?"

"This is a strap for stability. If you grab it quickly when she leans or rocks, you can maintain your balance."

"Riding leviathans sure is rough..."

"I'm sorry! Every time I remember we're going to alraune territory, the stress interferes with my piloting."

An announcement from Vania echoed through the room. She had the same sort of method for that as her sister, Fatla.

"Just deal with it. You are a leviathan, so even if they do pick a fight, you can certainly win it," I said.

"Alraunes are treacherous. They might use some sort of cheap trick..."

"You never know; they might welcome us warmly, the way that farm did several years back."

"You say that because you don't really know alraunes, boss. They'd never be generous."

How much does she hate alraunes anyway? If she said things like

that in public, they'd call her a racist and run her right out of town.

"On that point, my sister's view may be the correct one," Fatla said. She was still hanging on to the strap. "Alraunes are vicious at heart. You really mustn't let your guard down. And family lineage is extremely important to them, so I expect their hatred of you is murderous, Lady Beelzebub."

"Oh, come on. Don't threaten me too much."

"It isn't a threat. That said, you're far stronger now than you were when you first became minister of agriculture, so I doubt it's anything you can't handle."

She just takes it for granted that we'll be fighting, huh? I thought, grabbing one of the ceiling straps myself as Vania rolled to the side again.

Hell's bells, I'd fare better flying with my own wings...



And so we went to see Lord Nastoya.

We told the alraune gatekeeper why we were there. His feet looked like plant roots, which was typical for an alraune.

"Understood. My master will be here before long, so if you'd be so kind as to wait..."

As we'd been told, we waited outside the gate.

Let us in first, would you? I thought, but it wouldn't do to get hostile right off the bat. We'd wait.

Fifteen minutes went by.

"Excuse me, is he going to be much longer?" Fatla asked the gatekeeper.

They'd kept us standing there the whole time, so I could understand why she was irritated. Fatla always looked irritated, but I was positive she was genuinely annoyed now.

"Ah, my apologies. I'm sure he's having trouble deciding what to wear."

After that, we had no choice but to wait.

Thirty minutes went by.

"Really, what is the meaning of this? Hurry and summon your master, if you would," Fatla pressed the gatekeeper.

However, the gatekeeper only said, "I don't understand it myself."

Fatla turned my way with a really scary expression on her face. I thought she was going to yell at me for a second, and I flinched.

"He already got us. He's harassing us by making us wait forever."

“That...seems extremely likely.” Something was obviously amiss. Vania had sat down in front of the mansion and was taking a nap. “That’s disgraceful! Wake up!” Fatla scolded and promptly shook her, but...

One hour later.

“Thank you for coming, plebian Minister of Agriculture.”

Finally, Lord Nastoya turned up, walking on root feet that looked like octopus tentacles. One look at his face was enough to tell he was of noble blood.

“Plebian? I am a proper noble now, mind you. Well, that doesn’t matter. I’m tired after all this standing. Show us to a room with chairs.”

My rank was currently higher than his, so I went with the arrogant approach. I was getting used to acting more pompous, too.

“Yes, of course, do follow me. Plebian Minister of Agriculture.”

They did have chairs waiting for us—ratty, rickety chairs that looked ready to collapse the moment we sat on them. They were warped and leaning; a stiff breeze might knock them apart. Saying they were collections of boards in the shape of chairs would have been more accurate.

“Oh-ho, is this an attempt at living green or something...?” My temples were starting to twitch.

Fatla was glaring steadily at the man.

“These are the only chairs I can provide you with. I’m terribly sorry.”

He really did have a nasty personality. I hadn’t expected him to be such a lowlife.

Vania whispered in my ear. “Boss, please don’t take a swing at him, okay? He’s trying to get you to start a fight. He’s planning to make it so that we attack them, and then they can thrash us in self-defense.”

I couldn’t entirely write that off as Vania’s delusion. They were out for blood.

“Let’s get down to business, Lord Nastoya. I’m told your territory hasn’t sent in even the slightest bit of tax money, so I came to look into it. Would you show us to your farmland?”

“Before we get to that, I imagine you’re tired. Please have a drink.”

They brought us a purple mystery beverage that was very obviously sinister. No matter how careless you were, nobody would just gulp this down without asking questions.

Or so I thought, but Vania was about to drink it until I covered her mouth with my hand.

“Mrgl, mrgl...!”

“You make it too easy.” Fatla slowly took something that looked like pink stationery labels out of her jacket. “This paper tests for poisons. If mild poison is present, the pink paper will turn brown; for strong poison, it will turn black.”

She put some on.

It turned jet black.

“Yes, that’s lethal poison. We must not drink this under any circumstances.” Fatla turned a menacing glare on Lord Nastoya.

We couldn’t start that fight, so she was threatening him with her eyes.

“My, my, I’m sorry about that. I must have added poison completely by accident.”

Nothing was beneath this guy when it came to mocking us... That was a crime, not an accident. Couldn’t we put together a case?

“Now then, I’ll show you to the farmland. Be sure to check the harvest numbers.”

This time, they took us to a farm that was a short distance from the manor.

They grew wheat here, and we were going to take a look at how well it was growing.

While we were on the move, we never let our guard down and kept an eye on the situation at all times.

Lord Nastoya was in the carriage with us until we were close to the farmland, and the man might very well attack us himself. Everyone here except us was the enemy.

In the end, we got to the wheat field without incident.

“To be perfectly frank, it’s an excellent crop.” Fatla sounded annoyed.

I nodded.

“It looks delicious, doesn’t it? The ears are hanging low. I bet you could bake good bread with this.” Vania was missing the point a little, but she meant the same thing.

This was not a poor crop. As a matter of fact, it was a bumper crop.

So his failure to pay taxes really had been a kind of sabotage.

“Lord Nastoya, I really don’t think you could ever consider this a bad crop—”

I turned to look at the lord—

And he was gone! Even though we’d gotten out of the carriage together!

Instead, alraunes armed with bows and arrows were bearing down on us!

They were most definitely planning to kill us.

“Why you little...! You tricked us!”

“I knew it! Alraunes are the worst! We should never have come here!”

We ran for it. If we didn’t run, we’d get shot!

Ah, if this is how it’s going to be, should I have followed my instincts and just kept pushing my pencil as a bottom-tier bureaucrat? At the very least, there wouldn’t have been any attempts on my life...

I considered striking back with magic, but there were mage types stealthily lurking in the field, too. They were probably there to get in the way if we tried to cast spells. Since casting spells would make us more vulnerable, it would actually be a fatal error...

However, it wasn’t as if we’d made no plans of our own. We weren’t grunt-level demons.

“Lady Beelzebub, distance yourself from me a little, please,” Fatla said, moving to stand in front of me. “This is a field, so I have room. Leave it to me.”

“All right. Don’t you dare get hurt, though.”

I took Vania’s hand and put some distance between us and Fatla. We appeared to be abandoning her, but that wasn’t the case at all.

As Fatla stood there by herself, they prepared to launch their arrows at her. Just then, she transformed into her enormous leviathan shape!

The arrows bounced off her hard skin like little toys.

“Sh-she’s way too huge!”

“We can’t fight that!”

At the sight of the leviathan, the alraunes ran away with their tails between their legs.

...Not that alraunes have tails.

“We seem to have made it out alive...”

For the moment, Vania and I decided to hole up in a building on top of Fatla.

“Honestly, what they’re doing is beyond unacceptable. Let’s go back to the demon king immediately and report them!” Vania was already on the verge of tears, and I completely sympathized. However

“If we go home when things are like this, it will cause trouble for them, too. Their boss will probably come out to explain it.”

Sure enough, from our vantage point up on top of Fatla, we spotted Lord Nastoya emerge.

I had Fatla turn back into her human shape, then confronted the lord.

“I’m terribly sorry, plebian Minister of Agriculture. The fact that

there was hunting here today slipped my mind. That was a bit of a blunder. Ha! Ha! Ha!”

I see. So he's going to keep playing innocent, huh?

“Well, everybody makes mistakes. I'll forgive you,” I told him, smiling proudly.

Lord Nastoya's smirk crumbled, probably because I was being excessively nonchalant.

“You see, I don't trouble myself with trivial matters. As you well know, I'm the minister of agriculture. If I got caught up in the details and neglected the big picture, I'd never make it as the minister of agriculture. Indeed, I am from common stock, but the minister of agriculture is the minister of agriculture. ♪ Because she is, after all, the minister of agriculture... ♪”

Lord Nastoya's expression froze over.

I knew it.

This man had one heck of a complex over not getting to be the minister of agriculture.

“And so, Lord Nastoya, I'd like to ensure the big picture is clear. From the looks of it, there are no problems at all with your harvest, and I want you to pay your taxes properly. Understand? That's all I came to accomplish as the minister of agriculture, so you do your job as a backcountry lord, would you?”

“S-silence, whelp!” Lord Nastoya roared, finally showing his true colors. “What ‘minister of agriculture’?! A nobody from nowhere becoming a minister—the world's gone mad! By all rights, I should have been minister of agriculture!”

“What you think doesn't matter. The fact is, right now, the head of the Ministry of Agriculture is me, and you are just a retired noble has-been. Pay your taxes, would you? You can talk nasty about me all you want, just pay your taxes! Pay up, pay up, pay up!”

“Hmph! Making a pathetic wench like this the minister of agriculture... That little girl of a demon king is a benighted fool!”

That was crossing a line.

“Hey! Insulting the demon king is an inexcusable crime—one you might pay for in blood!”

I couldn't care less what people said about me. I'm sure if I listened to every uninformed opinion about me, my whole life wouldn't be enough time to hear all of it.

I was a minister who made an unprecedented rise to power from the bottom of the heap. I must have blackmailed somebody, right? I was some high-ranking official's lover, right? I'm sure somebody was saying it. If I let that get under my skin, I'd never survive.

But I couldn't let insults directed at the demon king slide.

“The leviathans who serve you are just as foolish. They must be

completely devoid of pride to obey such a low-class demon!”

Why, that little—! Fatla and Vania, even!

“Lord Nastoya, I challenge you to a duel. If I win, first you will apologize to both my secretaries, and then you will present yourself to the demon king and apolo— Bwuff!”

Fatla had come up behind me and caught me in a nelson hold.

“What are you saying?! You were coolly backing him into a corner, so why bring up dueling?!”

“Lemme go, Fatla! Insulting me is one thing, but I cannot let him get away with insults to the demon king and my subordinates! Otherwise, I am a failure as minister of agriculture!”

Vania came to help Fatla out. She was almost crying. “Boss, in a duel, you might get killed, you know?! Please take it back!”

Right. Depending on the situation, people sometimes die in duels.

Lord Nastoya was licking his chops. He probably expected this to go his way.

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“In that case, if I win the duel, may I respectfully request your resignation as minister of agriculture? Can we agree to those terms?”

“Yeah! I’d be happy to! And your attempts at politeness now are completely pointless.” I didn’t back down one little bit.

“I am of noble birth, after all, and my family’s status reaches back for generations. Low-level demon though you may be, I acknowledge the fire that makes you stand your ground so firmly.”



We chose to duel in the mansion’s garden.

Lord Nastoya had a sword. Alraunes could attack with vines that extended from their bodies, too, so that blade was probably a weapon meant to take my life.

I was empty-handed. As a rule, I didn’t carry weapons around with me.

The spectators all had ties to my opponent’s house, so this was an “away” game for our team.

That said, I didn’t intend to excuse myself by saying, *I lost because our cheering sections were different sizes.*

“Lady Beelzebub... If you feel you’re in danger, please forfeit...”

“Boss, even if you get fired, we’ll support you at the leviathan house for life!”

My two secretaries were cheering for me, and that was enough... *Wait, is that cheering? They might actually be worrying...*

“Hrrmmm. *Siiiigh*... My blood’s begun running rather hot over these past few years.”

It was almost hard to believe I’d ever plugged away processing accounts.

I wonder what sort of rank-and-file bureaucrat is doing my job at this point. I made a manual and left it for my replacement, so if they read it properly, they should be able to do the work by now...

“I’ll crush this low-born demon and make my return to the Ministry of Agriculture! Your resignation should change the winds of fate!”

Yeah, sure, talk all you want. The only way to drain the pus with this type is to crush it completely.

I understood why I’d been sent here, too. It was to fan the flames of jealousy for someone I’d personally bumped off the ladder of success.

In that case, let’s have him burn himself to ashes.

I drew a deep breath. *Always take deep breaths before the important things.*

That wasn't something anyone had taught me. Actually, it was something I'd said to Fatla back when Vania had burned some important documents. Even calm Fatla had turned so red in the face, I'd had to remind her to breathe.

"After all, if this were another era, I'd be an executive of the demon king, blocking the humans' advance. If I can't put down one country-bumpkin noble, I'll never get anywhere."

"Hold your tongue, lowly commoner!" Lord Nastoya ran at me on those root legs of his.

I spread my wings and charged at the enemy.

Don't underestimate the Lord of the Flies!

I slipped through the enemy's vine whips, and—

"Who are you calling a commoner?! I'm a proud noble!"

—I decked him in the face.

Whuddd!

"You insolent oaf!" I cried.

I'd knocked the enemy off balance, so I hit him again.

Krakk!

"And you even insulted the demon king! That's a grave crime!"

This time, I kicked up from the lower left.

Whomp!

Then I clasped both hands and brought them down on his head like a hammer.

Boooooooooom!

Okay, now for the next attack, I started to think, but Lord Nastoya had already blacked out.

"Hmm...? Is it over? Was that good enough?"

I'd expected the fighting to get fiercer, but my opponent didn't even look like he was going to move, and not even a noble as rotten as this one would play dead and watch for an opportunity.

I kicked him one more time, just in case, but he only dribbled something like drool from his mouth. Sap, I guess?

When I looked at my secretaries, they weren't jumping around and cheering at all. They just looked stunned.

"What...? Did I break the rules somehow? I'm rather concerned by your reactions..."

"Boss! You're so strong, it's almost creepy! Actually, it *is* creepy! It's creepy!"

"Hey, Vania! If you say any more than that, I'll dock your pay!"

You could hardly even call that a compliment!

"Lady Beelzebub, you did keep diligently working all this time to get stronger... However, I never dreamed it would be so... You're top class, even for a demon..." Apparently, Fatla couldn't believe it, either, but before long, a smile bloomed on her face. "Congratulations,

Lady Beelzebub.”

That brief comment made even my eyes get a little moist.

“I feel as if I’m your boss for real now.”

I walked over to the sisters and pulled them both into a hug.



“—And that concludes my explanation of the plan to distribute the territory under Lord Nastoya’s control.”

I wrapped up my report in the demon king’s chambers.

There was no point in telling the other executives about this, so it was just the two of us.

For a variety of reasons, including his crime of neglecting to pay his taxes without a legitimate reason and the crime of insulting the demon king, Lord Nastoya had been exiled.

“Yes, Miss Beelzebub, well done.” The demon king came up to me and patted me on the shoulder. “You’re rapidly growing into a demon after my own heart. It makes me happy.”

“Your Majesty, you sent me because you knew it would turn out this way, didn’t you?”

Send in the person most likely to irritate a fallen noble and goad him into picking a fight—both Lord Nastoya and yours truly had been neatly manipulated by our king.

“Oh, that’s so complicated; I’m not sure I understand.” The demon king feigned ignorance with a smile.

After that reaction, I can’t even pursue the issue.

“However, I do have an ideal—an image of an ideal elder sister.”

“H-huh...”

What the heck is she talking about?

“Somebody everyone loves, even idolizes—who exudes an air of nobility despite her common birth, who has earned all of it with hard work. Splendid, don’t you think?”

One thing’s for sure—she’s talking about me.

“And that big sister’s sworn little sister is a girl born into the most noble of noble families. Don’t you think that’s a marvelous gap?”

This time, the demon king put her hands on my shoulders.

Her eyes look dead serious...

“I feel as if I’ve finally managed to mold you into my ideal elder sister, Miss Beelzebub. Hee-hee-hee-hee...”

I sensed that I was in danger.

Yes, it was true I couldn’t come close to matching the demon king’s true power, but this fear was based in something else entirely.

“W-well, I still have work to do as the minister of agriculture, so I’ll be going!”

I backed away from the demon king, then got out of the room fast.



From behind me, I heard a voice say, “Wait! Please don’t run away, my elder sister candidate!” but I ignored it.

I thought I’d crushed an enemy and finally managed to act as a minister of agriculture should—

But I got the feeling another awkward problem had reared its head.



We Renovated the Office Cafeteria

“I am truly sorry, boss!”

As I entered the ministerial office early that morning, Vania suddenly apologized to me.

“Ah yes. Let me know once you’ve finished writing your apology. And be sure to include what you plan to do to make sure this does not happen again,” I said, using my folding fan to cool my face.

I gracefully took my seat at my desk.

If I were to get angry at every mistake Vania made, I would be upset for the rest of my life. I had to maintain a forgiving mindset.

“Oh, no, this won’t require a letter of apology, boss.”

“Oh? Then what sort of mistake have you made?”

“Aren’t you being a little too casual about this...? Can’t you sound a bit more interested?”

She was starting to sound like a pushy girlfriend...

“Just say it. I shall decide whether or not to be interested once I hear about it.”

“Here!” Vania presented to me a piece of paper.

“Ahhh, our lunch provider is closed today.”

LUNCH

We are temporarily closed today, but we look forward to serving you again soon.

Don't choose between taste and health—choose Darkness Lunch Box.

"I'm sorry! I completely forgot! Which is why I didn't have any time to make lunch for myself... I have nothing to eat today!"

Vania seemed overly guilty about this, but—

"It's all right. No need to apologize so much."

"What? It's really okay? But lunch is the greatest source of working energy!"

"I care not for your unique definition of lunch."

She would only ever think about lunch before noon.

Fatla ignored our conversation entirely and was already checking some documents.

There was no question that she cared even less for this than I did. I was surprised that sisters could have such opposing personalities.

"Then we shall eat lunch at a restaurant somewhere in town. 'Tis a bit far, but that cannot be helped."

A good majority of the offices for each ministry sat in the district between the outer moat and inner moat of the castle. So by some definitions, our office was within castle grounds.

One could not cross the bridge on the outer moat and find oneself in a shopping district, so there was a bit of distance before one came to a street with proper restaurants.

"Ten minutes one way means it would be twenty minutes there and back, and having to wait in line could pose a problem. However, no customers at lunchtime is surely a sign that the establishment is no good... Hmm, this is distressing..."

“Exactly! You need real tactics when it comes to lunch in town! Now you understand!” Vania seemed to be enjoying this. “Depending on whether you discover a hidden gem or a dud, the place you go to can dictate your working energy for the rest of the day! You can’t make thoughtless judgments when it comes to work!”

“Even if you end up in a restaurant that might not be so good, you must still do your work,” I interjected.

And do you not make mistakes even on days when you loudly proclaim the virtues of your lunch? I doubt it affects the quality of your work.

“If that does not give you enough time, then why not use the cafeteria here in the building?” Fatla suggested, her eyes still trained on the documents.

This was not worth it to her to stop working, and I thought the same. Still, she was listening.

“The cafeteria, hmm. Ah yes, that is on the first floor, no?”

Most offices had a cafeteria, and that included the Ministry of Agriculture.

The one Fatla mentioned was also open to regular citizens, not just employees, so anyone could walk in and use it.

I doubted any regular citizens would come all this way to have lunch at a ministry cafeteria, but ’twas likely for the many visitors we had from various companies.

“I have never used it before. I worked in the Agricultural Policy Organization previously, and that is in a different building. After I became minister, I’ve only ever had the Darkness lunch box.”

And the lunches Vania would sometimes make for us.

While I did pay her properly, she had said it was simply a hobby of hers. A hobby she was excellent at, given she had graduated from culinary school.

“Then let’s go to the cafeteria on the first floor! I haven’t eaten there in a long time, so I’m thrilled to try it!” Vania was getting excited.

Her motivation was truly and deeply tied to food.

“What?” I said. “You both work in the main building; haven’t you had plenty of opportunities to eat there?”

Her reaction made it seem like she knew nothing about the cafeteria.

“It is a bit of a pain to go all the way down to the first floor, so I always had Vania order Darkness lunch boxes for us,” Fatla replied, still working.

You will do anything to keep working, won’t you?

“The career bureaucrats start working on the upper floors right after joining the ministry, after all. It was too much trouble to go

down.”

“Hrrm... What a hierarchical society... But 'twould be a bit unsatisfying to have someone of high status on a lower floor...”

There was a consensus among us that the more powerful, more important people should be stationed on the upper floors. I suppose that came from when we were at war with the humans, and the bosses would often wait on the higher floors.

“And when you’re on the wrong floor, the elevator rarely comes. All the important people would get on from the upper floors, so it would often fill up before it got to the lower floors. On the other hand, we did not want to take the stairs.”

An “elevator” was a box that moved up and down. There was someone to pull the ropes (an employee from a private company, not a staff member of the ministry) that would bring it to the different floors. The cost of the labor tended to run up very high, so they could only be found in tall buildings like the ministries.

“I see... I suppose that is a thing that happens here in the office...”

“I also agree we should try the cafeteria.”

“Very well. Then we shall do so.”

“However, I believe it will be terribly crowded if we go during lunchtime, since all the employees will head there at once,” said Fatla. “Why don’t we work for an extra hour before heading down? I believe that will smooth out our lunch plans.”

“You are the definition of detail-oriented, Fatla...,” I mused.

Vania was pouting a bit at the prospect of her morning work hours being one hour longer as a result, but I ignored her. She wouldn’t be putting in any overtime, after all.



And then the clock struck one.

“Yes! It’s lunchtime! Lunch! Lunch! Lunch!”

“Vania, how enthusiastic can you be?!”

She was yelling like a cuckoo clock.

“Lunch is later than usual! So I’m extra hungry, and extra excited to eat at the cafeteria, and twice as enthusiastic as I usually am!”

“If I could find as much joy in food as you do, my life would be pure bliss...,” I commented.

The leviathan sisters and I headed down to the first floor, where the cafeteria was.

Ah, the cafeteria. Now that I thought about it, I rarely ever passed this corner of the building. I wondered what it was like.

Perhaps it would be surprisingly modern and stylish. I wondered if

they had a fluffy-omelet lunch set or anything similar.

When we arrived at the entrance, I first noticed that it was dark.

There was a gauche sign that read MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE CAFETERIA. There was no door, so we could see all the tables inside before going in, but I felt as hesitant to enter this place as I would an eccentric little hole-in-the-wall bar.

There was no one else inside, perhaps because we had come an hour later. It was too quiet.

I suppose that was one reason why I felt so hesitant to go in. An empty cafeteria is never a good sign.

There was a panel next to the entrance:

Meal-Ticket System

Tell the staff member to the right of the entrance what your order is, then retrieve a ticket.

Once your food is ready, the chef will call for you, and you can hand in your ticket.

Water is self-serve.

This system felt quite old-fashioned.

“Hmm, this is very retro...” Vania seemed somewhat uncomfortable.

“We are not going to be attacked. Come now, let’s go in. Oh, I suppose we must choose what we want first.”

The menu contained things like Lunch Set A, Lunch Set B, Lunch Set C, and curreh.

Also, in terms of noodles, they had ra-ment and spaghetti.

Lunch Set C was the most generous, so I went with that one. As an added bonus, it did not cost very much.

I turned right from the entrance and said, “One Set C.”

Once I'd paid the money, a middle-aged demon lady rushed over and handed me a tag that read *SET C—5*.

And I would hand this off to the chef once my number was called to receive my food.

After I waited a little while, at a corner labeled *PICK-UP WINDOW*, the cook came over and called, "Set C!"

I placed the tag on the counter and received the tray with my food.

The main dish of the Set C was fried meat—what kind of meat it was, I was not sure. It also came with an unidentifiable soup and some bread. And finally, a small bowl of salad.

The place was empty, so I sat at a four-person table.

Vania and Fatla soon joined me, carrying a Set B and ra-ment respectively.

"Now let's dig in!" Vania placed her set tray before her, her excitement back in full force.

"Aye, let's." I brought a spoonful of soup to my mouth, while Vania took a sip of hers.

Ugh!

I was frightfully close to yelling aloud.

That was how bad it was. I suppose *bad* was not quite the right word—*flavorless* would be more accurate.

What is this? Lukewarm water?

"...This soup is quite bad, isn't it?"

I had not seen Vania scowl like that before. So my reaction was not wrong.

I next took a bite of the mystery-meat cutlet. This meat was dry and unpleasant, and the seasoning was scant. Even after munching on it for a bit, I still had no idea what sort of meat it was.

"This cannot be edible without any sort of sauce... But there is no sauce on the table..."

The only seasoning stand was in front of the counter, so I had no choice but to go and get it.

After I drowned the meal in sauce, I somehow managed to stomach it. Any flavor it pretended to have was utterly eclipsed by the taste of the added sauce.

Vania wore a look of displeasure as she ate her odd stir-fry that came with the Set B.

"The heat hasn't been well distributed, and the vegetables are all mushy. The texture has been entirely rendered into nothing. There was no effort; the chef believed that it was okay to fry everything so long as it was all cooked through. They may not be able to use

expensive ingredients, but first and foremost, the problem lies with the skills of the one who prepared this food.”

“You have so much to say about cooking.”

This was the most serious I had ever seen Vania.

In the meantime, Fatla was quietly slurping on her ra-ment, which sat in an amber soup.

“What does that taste like, Fatla?” I asked.

“Perhaps very low-quality ra-ment that would be served at a cheap, run-down restaurant in the countryside. Or the kind served at food halls in a carriage station’s waiting rooms.”

“Mmm... So when one has no other choice...”

“It tastes exactly the same.”

A damning assessment.

“Not much can be done about the noodles, considering they aren’t handmade, but I would like it if they took a little more care. This is the sort of thing I would eat if I simply needed something in my stomach.”

After eating about 70 percent of the noodles, Fatla put her fork down. A small gesture to show that this establishment was no good.

I looked around the cafeteria again.

We were here past the peak, yes, but it was still much too empty.

“Well, I suppose we can go search for a place in the town around the castle next time. We will call this a defeat for now. There are some things we will never know without trying them, after all.” Vania looked so unbelievably discontent that it scared me. I wondered if she would be able to get any work done in the afternoon.

This awful lunch would put a damper on the rest of our day. *Perhaps I should take these two to a nice restaurant in the evening... Perhaps there, we could complain about the cafeteria...*

But contrary to my expectations, Vania worked at a nice, brisk pace in the afternoon.

She was checking all sorts of papers, and she even left the office several times to fetch relevant documents from other departments.

At the very least, she seemed to be going above and beyond expectations.

But when it came time for work to be done—

“Vania, why don’t we go and eat together, all three of us? You must want to complain about that cafeteria, no?”

“My apologies, but I’m busy assembling some materials, so please feel free to go with my sister,” she replied.

“Are you all right? Your personality has changed. Have you been brainwashed by a spell?”

Fatla patted me on the back. “Lady Beelzebub, Vania is a public

official, so she does have the requisite skill to do her job. She simply never has the motivation for it.”

“I see... Well, if she’s finally taking her work seriously, then we shall leave her be...”

I did wish this would happen more often, however.



The next day, Vania handed me a very thick stack of documents.

“Please take a look at this, boss!”

“Let’s see, *Proposal for the Renovation of the Ministry of Agriculture Cafeteria?*”

“I cannot stand to see such an unmotivated eatery! I will spearhead the cafeteria’s rebirth!”

She was oddly enthusiastic about this!

I looked through the contents.

She had collected detailed data. As a result of the current tab system, the cafeteria was ordering food from the cheapest provider, which meant those who used it were not at all satisfied with the experience.

“I believe you’ll see this when you look through the data, but more than seventy percent of the people working in the ministry do not use the cafeteria. Everyone knows the food is terrible. And when employees who do regularly use it were asked about their degree of satisfaction, only twenty percent responded either ‘very good’ or ‘good.’ Over sixty percent said it was ‘bad’ or ‘infuriatingly terrible!’”

“When did you collect this data?”

“I conducted a survey after lunch yesterday.”

What unbelievable enthusiasm...

“By having the cafeteria serve better food, our employees will be more eager to work! And if everyone eats at the cafeteria, then we will not have to get lunch all the way out in the town around the castle! Think of the convenience! Let’s do this! We must do this!”

Vania leaned in toward me hungrily, supplicating.

“Very well... I understand how you feel... Due to the contract, we cannot immediately change our supplier, but we can change the furnishings and the menu... However, that is quite a major project, so someone will need to take charge—”

“I’ll do it!” Vania yelled. “Lunch will be the core of my work! Neglecting our food is the same as neglecting our work! The same as neglecting the whole Ministry of Agriculture!”

“Those things are not equal.”

“Yes they are! No demon can live without eating! Equipping the office with a bad cafeteria is like trying to kill our employees!”

I had no idea this side of Vania existed...

Her logical progression was a bit of a mess, but she'd convinced me.

I glanced over to Fatla, but she naturally carried on with her assigned work with an air of nonchalance.

I do wish she would help her minister when I am being cornered.

Well, if Vania herself said she would do it, then I suppose I would leave it in her hands.

To be honest, if there were any parts of this project that she couldn't handle, I was sure Fatla and I could easily fill in the gaps.

On the signature line, I wrote, *Approved—Minister Beelzebub.*

"Go on, then. Do as you please."

"Thank you so much! I have taken the very first step on the path of the cafeteria's rebirth! The gears of change have begun turning and will usher in a new era!"

"Calm down, Vania."

But since she had gone through all the trouble, it was time to watch and see how much potential Vania really had.



Starting that day, I couldn't say for sure if the gears of change were turning or not, but what was certain was that Vania was now working. And working hard.

For a while after that day, she was often away from the ministerial office.

"I have a meeting with a contractor regarding the cafeteria renovation now!"

"I will be helping with the lunch lady's culinary training!"

"I am going on a business trip to a rural farm to procure ingredients!"

And so on, for days on end.

To be honest, I'd scolded her when she said she would be taking a business trip far away—"*Write a business-trip request form! Do not go without my permission!*"—but I mostly left everything in her hands.

One day when she was gone on a trip, I quietly murmured in Fatla's direction, in a tone that suggested I was musing to myself and required no response:

"I thought I knew everything about Vania, but I was entirely mistaken."

"There are those across the world who have no passion at all, but

my sister is particularly passionate about cooking.” Fatla sounded rather proud of her—or at least, not annoyed. “In fact, I would say she is so uncompromising because she is not working as a professional in the field.”

I thought back on my time living in the countryside. “I am a tad jealous.”

Back when I was helping with my parents’ greengrocery, my life felt somewhat unsatisfying.

I had blamed the rural environment and fled to the castle town, but in the end, I had only continued my simple life. I had chosen not to put my all into anything for a long time, and that was my own fault.

After a moment of silence, Fatla responded, “You are rather passionate about your work as the agricultural minister now, Lady Beelzebub, so I suppose you’re all right.”

I could see the demon king’s face in my mind’s eye.

I suppose she had changed my life. For better or for worse, there was no doubt that it had changed.

How can I ever repay you, Your Majesty?



Ever since Vania jumped into the cafeteria renewal project, I, too, started to pass by the cafeteria more frequently.

Though, I still did not use it; I only did so to check on the renovations.

One day, I found a paper that read *WE WILL BE OPENING AFTER REFURBISHMENT SOON* plastered in front of the old-fashioned cafeteria.

And one week after that, it was temporarily closed for renovation.

The establishment had not been very popular to begin with, so no one seemed especially inconvenienced. I was unsure how to feel about that, though...

One day, I could hear Vania’s voice coming from inside.

“Just fifteen seconds should be enough! You’ll ruin the texture if you leave it on the heat any longer than that! Be careful!”

She was instructing the cafeteria lady, apparently.

“Now here’s the old vegetable stir-fry, and here’s the one you just made. Compare them! Totally different, wouldn’t you say? You can use this technique for your own recipes, too, so please take this knowledge home with you!”

What was her real job again...?

And then another week later.

The exterior of the cafeteria had transformed into a stylish café! It

seemed the inside was still under construction, and there was no doubt they were making drastic renovations.

There was a sign outside that listed the date they were planning to reopen.

Under Vania's watchful eye, the place would be completely revived soon...



Finally, it was opening day.

Surprisingly, I found Vania working in the minister's office bright and early that morning.

"Oh, are you sure you don't need to be in the cafeteria?"

"What are you talking about? I'm a secretary. I'm supposed to be in the minister's office."

"I apologize for being sarcastic. But you have been spending much more time in the cafeteria as of late."

Plus, it was odd to complain about her working, so I chose to take my own seat for the day.

A little before eleven, Vania came to stand before my desk. "Boss, there's a task the minister needs to do."

"I am doing plenty of them right now."

"No, I mean the first customer at the renovated cafeteria should be the one at the top of the ministry."

Ah, so eleven was the opening hour.

"Very well. Then I suppose I shall be eating lunch a little earlier than normal." I stood.

"Just to be sure, you haven't ordered the Darkness lunch box today, have you?" Vania asked.

"You haven't asked me about the order today, so it's all right."

I had indeed planned to pop by the renovated cafeteria on its opening day.

"Fatla, you—"

—*Should come, too* is what I was going to say, but she was already standing up.

"I will see my sister's project through to completion." It seemed Fatla was curious to see what her sister had been up to, as well.

We went down to the first floor and walked over to the cafeteria.

I had seen the modern exterior before, but not the brand-new menu.

"There are considerably more sweets on the menu now. And there are tea-set options, too."

“Exactly. You can now come down for a quick visit for your three o’clock snack. Also, would you mind if we stepped outside for a moment?”

We did, and there we found terrace seating! The outer moat was nearby, too, so it felt a bit like dining by the riverside.

“We’ve planned this out so that outside customers can use it as a café. Of course, you can also hold meetings here. I’m certain some tea will help with efficiency!”

“I’m not so sure about that, but you have entirely transformed the whole area, that’s for certain.”

Now—for the inside.

We went back into the building and made our way toward the cafeteria entrance.

“Welcome!” A young female demon greeted us.

“Mmm... I see you’ve fired the old-lady staffers and hired younger ones... That might have been a step too far for just renovating the cafeteria...”

“No need to worry about that. They’re only under a Glamour spell right now; they’re actually all the same employees!”

“You have made quite the change!”

“I have one granddaughter!” one of the employees said, shining with Glamour-induced youth.

If you can get a seemingly lazy person to invest in an activity, they can do it quite thoroughly, and this was a perfect example. It was similar to a person who rarely ever cleaned picking one day out of the year to get it all done.

“What will you have, boss? My treat!”

Well, it wasn’t as though the cafeteria cost very much.

“Hmm, I suppose I’ll order the three-salad lunch plate...”

“I will have ra-ment.”

Is Fatla secretly a big fan of ra-ment?

“It will be hard to tell the difference if I do not order the same,” she explained.

“I see... Fastidious as ever...”

The windows were open, and a breeze came in from the terrace.

The inside had been repainted a refreshing white, and the tables and chairs were the kind one would find in a stylish establishment (I did not frequent fancy restaurants, so I am well aware that I lack the vocabulary for this... I never had the courage to go alone... And nothing like this existed in my hometown).

“These tables and chairs must have cost quite a bit, no? Are you sure you’re still within budget?”

“Oh, I bought all the tables and chairs from a scrap-renovation company. They were actually very cheap.”

Vania wore an expression that read, *I'm glad you asked!*
You're the star today, Vania. Shine as bright as you want.

"And all the things on the menu are about twenty percent more expensive now. The five-hundred-koinne lunch sets have been replaced with six-hundred-eighty-koinne lunch plates and whatnot."

It sounded like she was planning on running a successful business by raising the prices.

"Ah yes, I see that all those uninspiring names like 'Lunch Set B' are gone... But do you think customers will come after you raise the prices so?"

"Hardly any customers were coming before, so we didn't have much to lose!"

"Indeed!"

Before, everyone believed it was cheap because it was bad...

"And the truly trendy establishments in the town around the castle ask for even more money. Paying more makes the customers feel rich. That is the concept for this cafeteria!"

"Please keep your voice down—you'll ruin the effect..."

Then a young-looking staff lady called out, "Three-salad lunch plate!" from the counter.

"Vania, is she also—?"

"That is the kitchen lady. The one who has been here for ages."

The Glamour spell was working well.

But everything I'd seen so far was simply superficial. The real question was how the food tasted.

I stabbed my fork into the vegetables on my lunch plate and carefully brought it to my mouth, making sure not to spill any of the dressing.

The tangy dressing, the fresh, sweet, leafy greens...!

"This tastes like something from a fancy restaurant!"

"Doesn't it?!" Vania cackled with the confidence of a boss monster. "Our staffers will feel themselves leveling up eating here! It will bring out the best in them! And it doesn't hurt the wallet at all! Here they can recharge their energy, then tackle their afternoon work undaunted!"

"Oh, Vania... I am so sorry for having doubted you thus far..." A tear rolled down my cheek.

Vania looked even more distinguished than she usually did, and I doubted any Glamour magic was involved.

"I honestly thought you were exaggerating when you said the quality of one's lunch could change one's motivation for work... But this food does boost my morale, certainly more than the lunch set from some run-down cafeteria..."

It might not be an exaggeration to say a revolution had occurred

within the Ministry of Agriculture.

Many more people would start using the cafeteria. I was sure of it.

"Thank you so much for understanding. This is what I hoped to achieve with the Improving-Work-Through-Food Project!"

"What an ambitious task you've been working on..."

"Oh, no, I thought up the name just a moment ago."

Some things never change, including Vania's impulsiveness.

As Vania and I spoke, Fatla quietly slurped her ra-ment and even drank all the broth. That is bad for you, Fatla!

"I see how it changed."

Fatla showed no sign of satisfaction, so it was hard to tell what she was thinking.

So did it pass? Or fail?

"I can see the noodles are now made at a proper noodle-making factory. And I can tell that you are using the fat from the chicken as a key ingredient. The addition of heavy spice gives it even more character. This cafeteria has a wide array of offerings, so it can never truly compete with specialty establishments that boil their own broth for hours. So in order to make up for that—to *hide* that, though I apologize for the word choice—you've chosen to embrace the spiciness of the broth and make it especially strong. I would not say this is the best way to increase customer satisfaction without raising costs too high, but it is certainly a better way."

Her answer was over one hundred words.

"Fatla, you certainly love ra-ment, don't you? I had no idea, since you never said anything."

"No, that is not so."

She was also stone-faced when she replied to my question, so I was uncertain if she was answering honestly, making a high-level joke, or trying to brush me off.

"Why don't you take me to a ra-ment place you like sometime in the future, hmm?"

"I will have to think it over." She dodged that one quite easily. "Ra-ment is not the type of food to chat over noisily with a group."

Oh, she is a fan...

All of a sudden, I started hearing lively voices.

"Whoa! It's so nice-looking now!"

"We can start showing off to the other ministries!"

"Let's eat outside on the terrace!"

Though it was still a little before noon, employees were starting to arrive, and the seats were filling up.

"It seems we have more customers than the noontime rush, and it's not even noon. While I'm sure the renovations are the reason so many more people are coming by, it's still a good way to start anew!"

Vania said, looking around the cafeteria.

She was like a mother proudly watching after her child.

“Aye, you did well, Vania.”

Thanks to our abysmally awful cafeteria, I got to see one of my underlings come into her own. One can never tell where they might find a silver lining.



One week later...

When I entered the minister's office, the leviathan sisters were arguing over something.

“Stop this at once!”

“Leave me alone, Sis!”

“I cannot let you do this—you know that!”

“This isn't a phase!”

Though the two had vastly different personalities, they did get along. The way they were fighting now was not normal.

“What is going on here?”

“Boss, I have a favor to ask of you!”

Vania's energy reminded me of when she asked my opinion on the cafeteria renovation. Perhaps she was thinking about renovating another ministry's cafeteria, too?

“This is for you!”

The paper she gave me read:

LETTER OF RESIGNATION

“.....What?”

“When I was working on the cafeteria renovations, I started thinking that it was time I open my own restaurant! I want to resign and become a great chef! Thank you for all you've done for me over the years!”

This was something I could not accept, and I told her exactly how I felt as her boss.

“No, hold on, hold on!” I cried. “Calm down and think a little before you make this decision!”

“Yes, exactly!” Fatla agreed. “You'll never be able to run an establishment on your own! You can't use taxpayer money for your own restaurant!”

“It's fine! I'll just take out a loan of five million koinne from the bank and start it up that way!”

“Then wait until you have earned enough money to start a

business before you quit!” Fatla cried. “Just thinking about you borrowing money is a terrifying prospect!”

“Indeed! Keep cooking as your hobby! I’m afraid you might do something terrible if you get caught between your dreams and reality, so please don’t do this!”

The fuss over Vania’s resignation subsided about three days later.

I suppose wanting the talents of one’s underlings to blossom wasn’t always a good thing...



I Planned a Trip...Er, a Training Excursion with the Department



All the wingless bureaucrats rolled into the corner of the building.

“Ahhh!” “Can you drive a little safer?!” “Ow, my back!”

As her passengers cried in agony, Vania, in her leviathan form, flew smoothly toward her destination. People knew her speed because she was like a warship.

We had quite a few passengers this time—sixty-five, to be precise. A lucky number for us demons, as it was a multiple of thirteen.

“I knew we should have taken Fatla...”

I was flapping my own wings, staying afloat within the building. Hovering would tire me eventually, so I planned to grab hold of something later.

Beside me, Fatla sat bound to her seat with some contraption she called a “seat belt.” It had apparently been newly installed for Vania’s shaky flights. A stability device did seem to be a safer option.

“The hard-and-fast rule of bureaucracy is to do the worst things first,” she said. “It would be best to experience our panic going outward first, then have my safe flying on the return trip. Especially since many will be very relaxed on the way back.”

“Mmm... But our whole department vacation will be for naught if people are injured before we even arrive.”

“None of us are so weak that we would be injured from this, so I wouldn’t worry.” Fatla was reading a book while she sat in her chair. I thought she might get motion sickness, but she seemed fine. “Besides, this is a business trip coupled with a training excursion. This is not a pleasure jaunt. This is work; please do not get these mixed up,” Fatla mentioned, reminding me of the surface reason we were going on this business trip.

“Oh, erm, yes... Indeed. We will have a good, thorough training session in the hot springs! We will learn of agriculture!”

Then I heard a voice. “*Ding-dong!*”

It was Vania’s sign that she was going to talk about something. She always said it before some sort of announcement or warning. Perhaps it was a kind of spell.

“My apologies for the turbulence. It is dusty up here in the atmosphere today, and my nose is all itchy. There might be even bigger bumps and shakes when I sneeze and whatnot, so please be careful~ You might fall off if you stand out on the deck, so those who cannot fly—please refrain from going outside~”

Vania’s carefree announcement echoed inside, and I heard our participants complaining soon after.

“Don’t take us on board if it’s going to be this dangerous!”

“At this point, I’d be safer clinging onto a drunken roc bird!”

Their criticisms were apt, but there was little we could do about her.

We had to save money on our trip. If the costs went too high, then we risked a reprimand for simply going off gallivanting...

“I’m sure it will turn out all right... Even if someone gets hurt, we are still on training. Our workers’ comp should apply...”



This whole incident began with a comment from Vania.

“I want to go to a hot spring.”

“The Purgatory Baths are in town. They are open quite late, so you can head there before you go home.”

The Purgatory Baths were a nice public-bathing area, but one had to be sure not to stay too long (or worse, fall asleep) and melt in the demonic spring waters.

“No, no, not a cozy little public bath, a bona fide hot spring. The kind you stay over at.”

“Hmm.” I gave a noncommittal response as I read my documents.

“You’re not listening, are you, boss?”

There was a hint of disappointment in Vania’s voice, though I was too busy reading to see her face.

“And you’re not working. You are on the clock, you know.” From my right, Fatla gave a sound argument.

Vania was on my left, ensuring I was properly flanked by my secretaries. This formation was apparently a holdover from when bosses fought with humans.

“Oh right, boss, you don’t have a lot of hobbies, do you? I don’t hear about you going out and stuff on your days off at all,” Vania commented. It was rude, but it was the truth, so it was hard to argue.

“I relax in my manor on my days off. Is there anything else to do?”

“Obviously! Make food, go sightseeing—lots of stuff!”

“Why am I not allowed to relax, even when I don’t have to work? They’re called days off, so why shouldn’t I be off?”

Ever since my days at the bottom of the ladder, I'd been without any hobbies. If I had to pick one, I'd say lazing around and drinking was mine. I lived my life doing nothing, especially since I had no dreams or goals.

However, the hundred years since I became a minister had passed so quickly.

Yes—over a century. It almost felt like it had been barely two weeks since I crushed those pompous alraunes, but in human terms, it had been almost four generations.

I had once heard that time flew by when one did the same sort of work for a long time, and that was true. Now that I had grown accustomed to my work as minister, the years after the first ten or so flew by in an instant. Perhaps it was time to do something different.

"Fine. We will go to a hot spring," I said as I scrawled my signature on the document. Then I looked at Vania. "You decide the itinerary. You're the one who wanted to go to this hot spring, so you must have a good place in mind, no?"

"Wait, really? Are you sure?" Vania was overjoyed. As her boss, I was happy to see it. "Are you really going to pay for everything? You're so generous, boss!"

"Hey! I said nothing about paying!"

This wasn't a drink or two at the bar; how much was she planning on make me pay?

"Aw, what? After all the hard work I've done as your secretary these years, I really thought you'd do at least that much for me..."

"Shall I carefully list every single incident in which I've had to clean up after you?"

Vania made mistakes on a regular basis. The problem lay in her personality, and if a century hadn't been enough to fix it, I doubted anything would.

In the meantime, Fatla was working silently. If we chatted for another three minutes, we ran the risk of angering her, so I had to speak while keeping our limits in mind.

"Sigh, I want to go to the hot spring on the boss's money~ This is a part of the service and benefits program, too~"

Just as I thought about how shameless she was—

Those words stuck in my ears: *service and benefits program*.

"Now that you mention it, the Ministry of Agriculture has not gone on a company trip yet, have we?"

"We have so many employees that we have never quite been able to hold one." Fatla had been listening to the entire conversation.

"I see, I see. Well, if we have no precedent, then we may as well make one, no?" I stood and took a book down from the bookshelf in the room. It was one that had a collection of newspaper-article

clippings relating to farming. “I feel as though I saw a good one about six months ago.”

I flipped through and finally caught sight of this headline.

BEAN SPROUTS IN HOT SPRINGS GROW QUICKLY!
QUICK SHIPPING, MANY VARIETIES

I chuckled to myself. We could do this. “Vania, Fatla, we’re going on a training excursion.” Vania frowned when she heard the word *training*, so I added a bit of extra information.

“We’re going to a hot spring.”



Things moved quickly after that.

In order to make sure this was a real training excursion, we got approval for things that needed approval, and made our sixty-five-person trip—I mean, training excursion—a reality.

Even though the volcano with the hot spring was in human territory, it was deep in the mountains where only dragons lived. We didn’t expect any trouble; dragons didn’t fear demons.

It wouldn’t feel like much of a trip if we didn’t go very far, and if it was close enough for a day trip, then we would not be granted any lodging expenses.

Additionally, by having all of us take the leviathans, we made sure to cut out all transportation expenses. If we paid for everyone’s traveling expenses with taxes, that would be difficult to excuse. We managed to keep our costs low by just asking for lodging for sixty-five people.

And so our trip...I mean, training excursion brilliantly took form!

Vania’s flying was unbelievably rough, but we arrived at the foot of Mount Rokko right on time.

“She knows what she’s doing with this trip,” I said to Fatla.

“I think my sister simply wants to relax for a long time,” she replied.

“This is nothing more than a training excursion, you see.”

“Indeed, nothing more. I know. Let us enjoy it to the fullest.”

I thought about how she was so good at separating her internal and external thoughts.

A fire-breathing species called the red dragons lived in Mount Rokko.

Dragons had all sorts of temperaments—the red dragons were honest and good-natured, but I had also heard they were rather prideful. Well, I was sure there must be some more subservient among them.

A man with horns growing out of his head was standing where we landed. Dragons had horns when they took on their human forms, so it was easy to tell them apart. He wasn't a normal human, at least.

"We have been waiting for you, demons."

"Greetings, I am Beelzebub, minister of agriculture. Could you take us to the hot spring...that is being used as a cultivating field for vegetables?"

Thanks to the volcano, there were hot springs bubbling up in the area.

"Yes. I will take you there—right this way."

I followed him, while the rest of the group followed me. The dragons looked on in curiosity since there were so many of us.

"We received a very enthusiastic offer from Vania the leviathan. We did everything we could to make sure you all have a wonderful time here."

"Yes, Vania is always on the ball when it comes to these things."

I glanced over at her, and Vania was smiling with satisfaction. She popped her right thumb up at me.

"I am envious that you have such skilled subordinates."

I was sure what he said was just lip service, but a compliment toward my subordinates was not unwelcome.

"She has a lot of potential, but it only ever shines through in times like these..." I wished she would be so enthusiastic about her regular work...

As we chatted, we arrived at our destination.

First, we came to a facility that was growing bean sprouts in the hot spring.

"The bean sprouts grow best here. The yield is high, too."

"Hmm, I can almost tell by looking that they have a nice, crisp texture."

This was work for the agricultural minister, but it reminded me a bit of a field trip. It was rather nice.

Vania tapped me on the shoulder. "Boss, I got them to prepare samples for us today. I really bargained with them!"

"You spared no effort, did you...?"

I was given a plate of bean sprouts with a drizzle of dressing on it.

"Mmm, these are—"

"SOOOOO GOOOOOOOD!!"

Vania shouted from beside me.

“What, what?! Why are you so loud?!”

“These are nothing like anything I’ve had before! They’re resilient and not grassy and just a little sweet—I’ve never had bean sprouts that were so proud to be bean sprouts!”

“You are much too excited about bean sprouts!”

“This is how impressed I am! See, the producers are happy, too!”

The dragon farmers certainly seemed happy to have grown them.

Next, we went to the carrots that also used hot spring water and received some cooked samples. It seemed like we would be trying them at every turn.

“Yes, the flavor is—”

“Sooooo goooooood!! I cannot believe how sweet this is! It’s almost like a fruit! It’s warm and delicious, like a completely different vegetable than the carrots I know! This is excellent! I’m seeing carrots in a whole new light!”

Fatla slid right up next to me. “My apologies, my sister gets incredibly excited about these things... She goes so over-the-top that it might even seem fake, but she is not exaggerating. I believe this will continue all day long, so please just endure it...”

“Very well... I will just accept that this is how it is...”

After that, Vania sampled all sorts of food with the same energy.

Garlic

“Sooooo goooooood!! I can feel my stamina rising! When I eat one, it feels like I could fight for an entire week! A+! I could fly to the ends of the earth!”

Onions

“Sooooo goooooood!! It’s so sweet! Onions usually have a bit of a bite, no? But there’s none of that here. It’s like all the nutrients from the hot spring and the soil have gone right into the vegetables! It’s almost like a fruit!”

“Hey! Your report on the onions is starting to sound like the one on the carrots! You just think you can call everything ‘like a fruit!’” I had decided I would stay silent, but in the end, I couldn’t keep it in. “And you open every evaluation with a loud ‘Sooooo goooooood!!’, tricking us with your enthusiastic reaction! It’s unfair!”

“Wh-why...? I’m just saying it’s good, and it is...”

“I can see how excited you are about this. It sticks in my mind—and gets on my nerves...”

Then Vania popped up her thumb on her right hand again.

“What are you doing with your finger? Is this a joke I’m not understanding?”

“Next, we will be receiving a drink and some food that will go with it. Let’s have a good round of drinks for lunch!”

My resolve began to falter at that. “Ooh... A drink at lunch... I suppose it’s all right, since this is a training excursion...”

We were served pork fried with onions and a generous amount of garlic, along with a nice, cool glass of alcohol. I could feel my mouth watering at an alarming rate.

“This would certainly go well with the drink—perhaps this dish was chosen to complement it.”

“Hee-hee-hee, your body knows what it wants, boss.”

“Don’t be crass. Listen. This is a training excursion. We are not here to play,” I said. We took a few bites of our lunch and washed them down with the drink.

““Ahhhh! Sooooo goooooood!!””

Vania and I cried at the same time.

We made a toast, enthusiastically clinking our glasses together.

“Well done, you! You pass!”

“I want a raise, please!”

“That is a different conversation.”

“Why are you suddenly so calm?!”

Fatla seemed a little exasperated at our antics, but she ate her food and drank, and her cheeks flushed red. She was probably having fun at the end of the day. I knew her well enough after all these years together to tell.

“Well, now that our training is finished, I suppose it’s time for us to head to the inn.”

Then the dragon-man who had shown us around approached us, slightly hesitant. “Pardon me, Lady Beelzebub. My daughter has mentioned she would like to have a brief spar with you...”

I had heard that dragons tended to be fond of battle—although, in the case of red dragons, it might be better to say they had a warrior’s spirit.



“My daughter has taken a great interest in you since you are known for your power, Lady Beelzebub...”

Since becoming minister of agriculture, I had certainly worked very hard in my training until I was a rather formidable member of my race. No demon would disparage me for being powerless now.

“Very well. I take no responsibility for any injuries, however.”

When I gave the okay, a young girl with horns came over to me. “My name is Laika. I am striving to become the strongest among the red dragons—no, among all dragonkind. Please spar with me!”

Her clear eyes reminded me of mine, back when I was struggling to get even stronger.

I folded my arms and nodded. “Take me to a place where you can breathe fire freely. You dragons cannot use your full power unless you are in your dragon form, no?”

I never thought I would be fighting on a trip.

Even though we currently lived in an era of peace, violence hadn’t been completely eradicated.

We moved to a vast, empty area, and Laika the dragon-girl changed into her dragon form.

“Yes, you seem quite strong. And tense.”

“Here I come!”

“I’m ready!”

We then engaged in a rather intense battle.

In the end—

It was my overwhelming victory.

I knew this would happen. I hadn’t trained myself so little that I would lose to the likes of a dragon.

After five minutes, Laika returned to her human form and lay on the ground. Her shoulders were heaving; she’d yielded.

“You still have much to learn. It was like you were attacking me with a rusted weapon.”

“Where did I fall short?” she asked me candidly.

There was no doubt that she was trying to grow stronger. I could sense that she was not so much vexed with herself, but that she felt the need to grow.

“You are too intense.”

“Should I not be...?”

It didn’t seem like she understood what I said.

“To be hardworking is good. You are simply not giving yourself

room to breathe, however. That is why you see nothing but what is right in front of you, and you leave so many openings in your stance. A taut thread is much easier to cut.”

I thought back on the past, and I almost laughed remembering how much my two leviathan secretaries had built me up. Before that, I had run laps around the castle moat. I couldn’t sit still unless I was doing something.

“Well, I am sure you’ll break out of your shell soon enough. Discard your rust. Well sharpened, the same weapon will be much mightier. Life is long. You may understand if you continue with as much intensity as you have now. But if you still don’t understand, then...”

I looked to my two secretaries, who stood a short distance away from us.

“Then perhaps it would be best to find a teacher who is nothing like me.”

Laika stood and bowed politely. “Thank you very much!”

“I hope we see each other again somewhere, though I can’t guarantee I’ll remember after such a short bout together.”



After that good round of exercise, we headed to the hot spring inn in Mount Rokko.

I was staying in a three-person room with my two secretaries. As the minister of agriculture, I got to stay in a higher-grade room with fewer people.

There was still time before dinner, so we decided to take a quick soak in the private outdoor bath connected to our room.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh, the water is so niiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiice.”

“Vania, no need to draw out your words quite so much.”

“It’s fiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiine.”

“Oh, I’m beginning to sweat.” Fatla’s expression was slightly relaxed. It must be the hot spring taking effect.

“It is nice to relax like this every once in a while.”

“This is still a training excursion, however.”

“You’re a tough one, Fatla.” I ruffled Fatla’s hair.

“Ugh! Don’t you tease me, too, Lady Beelzebub!”

“What? It’ll dry out. Heh, I was much too frightened to try anything like that when I first became minister.”

It was foolhardy for a low-level demon to prank a leviathan, but I finally felt like I had grown into my shoes as agricultural minister.

I was almost worthy of the legacy of my name, too.

“I am glad you are our minister of agriculture, Lady Beelzebub,” Fatla said quietly. “Things started to change in the demon world once the previous demon king ended the war with the humans. Many things had to change in order to keep up with the times. We needed new people like you, Lady Beelzebub, in order to make that happen. I think the current demon king had a keen insight when it came to that.”

Being naked together—or rather, being in the hot spring together—made it easier to put some things into words.

But to me, it seemed too early for such a confession. “I will not say thank you just yet. You will have to wait a little for that.”

“Of course. Please pretend I was talking to myself.”

“By the way...what’s my score as the minister now?”

After a moment of thought, Fatla responded. “Ninety-three.”

Much higher than seventy-five, which was what I had gotten last time.

“That’s an unusual number.”

“Minus two points for messing with my hair.”

“I should have asked before I did that!”

“And the other five points I’ve left open, because you might rise to even greater heights, Lady Beelzebub.”

For now, I would be satisfied with a passing grade as the minister of agriculture.

Or perhaps her grading scale was a little generous because of the hot spring?



Everyone gathered in the great hall of the inn so we could all eat dinner together.

On our tables were some of the vegetables that we sampled earlier that day, accompanied by the copious portions of meat typical of a dragon establishment.

I could see quite a few appetites had been whetted, but they would have to sit tight for a little bit.

I took my glass and slowly made my way to the front of the room. My job was to give the toast.

The chatter naturally died down, proving I had won their trust.

“Has everyone enjoyed themselves today? There’s no harm in having days like this every once in a while.”

It was a little embarrassing, but I had to say it at times like this.

“We’ve been working together for quite some time now—thank you all.” I bowed my head as though I was talking to close friends. “I used to spend my empty days idly, with no dreams or hopes for the

future. I did not understand why I had been made minister of agriculture at first, and I even cursed Her Majesty for foisting such a troublesome job onto me. Oh, no actual curses; don't worry."

This was where they were supposed to laugh, but no one did.

Surprisingly, they were listening to me earnestly.

"Of course, I knew I could not carry on as I had, so I worked hard in my own way. I have no intentions of denying my hard work. But if it were not for your support, nothing would have happened. It is all thanks to every one of you..."

As I spoke, tears started pooling in my eyes, but I knew not to worry. No one was going to laugh at me for crying in front of them now.

"Thank you... I really hope to have your support from here on out. I believe I can do my job without causing you as much trouble as I have in the past. That's because I want you to think of me...as the best minister in history..."

"Hooray for Lady Beelzebub!"

Someone suddenly shouted, and I realized Vania had stood up with tears streaming down her face.

"Hooray for Lady Beelzebub! Hooray for Lady Beelzebub! I'm not going to call you boss or minister right now! You are a noble, so you're Lady Beelzebub! Hooray for Lady Beelzebub!"

Hooray for Lady Beelzebub.

That chant finally spread throughout the entire room, and it kept on going for a while.

I was incredibly glad I had decided to go on this training excursion. Everyone in the Ministry of Agriculture was now connected by a tight bond!

"You are all the best! Hooray for the Ministry of Agriculture!"



Almost four hours later...

"Will you cut it out already?!" I yelled, walking among the rooms and down the hallway.

A pillow flew at high speed and slammed into the back of my head.

I whirled around to find one of the directors watching me with regret.

"How long will you all keep up this child's play?! What is this pillow war?!"

It was something very small that started it all.

Some of the people in one room started throwing pillows at one another, mostly in jest. A few of them then decided to take their pillows and “attack” their good friends in another room.

Those in the second room decided to carry out their “revenge” as a joke. Which was met with more “revenge.” Meanwhile, the “conflict” grew larger and larger—

And it was now on an unprecedented scale, with the rooms allying together to form an eastern and a western army...

If these were children playing, I wouldn't mind, but more than half of the people here were high-ranking demon officials. The force of the pillows alone was terrifying enough. I even received a report that some of the rooms were already damaged.

Perhaps this was how wars started. No one wanted it to happen, but before you knew it, the conflict had escalated.

No, this was not the time for me to think quietly to myself.

This pillow war was unfolding in the present continuous tense...

“You understand what will happen if you embarrass me any further, don't you? It is absolutely, unconditionally unforgiveable! All of you, take a bath and go to sleep!”

And so as I proceeded along the hallway, shouting cease-fire instructions—

I discovered Vania looking out on the situation from the landing on the stairs.

“Heh-heh-heh. The enemy will never know I'm here.”

“Well, *I* do.”

“Ugh! Boss!”

I was the one who wanted to grunt in frustration upon discovering my secretary participating in this.

“I *will* cut your pay... Are you ready for that? Stop this at once and go back to the room... And please tell me I am wrong when I ask you if you were the one to break the wall there.”

For some reason, she wore a bandanna (?) on her head that said VICTORY, too. Where did she buy that?

“Boss, there are times when a demon must fight. This is one of those times.”

I was impressed she said that with such a straight face—not a trace of mirth.

“Very well. I will not force you to stop, then.”

“Thank you! You *are* the best minister of agriculture! Hooray for Lady Beelzebub!”

“—But I cannot speak for your sister.”

Fatla gave Vania a good whack on the head from behind.

“Gaaah! When did you get there?!”

“Stop with this silly nonsense and go back to the room. If you do not listen to me, then I will tie your feet together and drop you from the stairs.”

“O-okay...”

Afterward, it took almost an hour for the fighting to stop, and as the minister of agriculture, I was obliged to offer my deepest, repeated apologies to the innkeeper. We did break a wall.

Maybe I should resign...

But it was because of the training excursion that I found a new hobby.

Now, when I had a day off, I would go travel, and I was slowly starting to visit more and more places in the human lands.

Perhaps now that I had occupied my current position for over a hundred years, I had the time to expand my horizons.

Very
well.

I take no
responsibility
for any
injuries,
however!

Please
spar
with
me!

☆ I was a Bottom-Tier
Bureaucrat for 1500 Years,
and Demon King Made Me a Minister ☆





A Nuisance Fell from the Sky



“Ahhh~ There’s nothing to do~ I’m so thankful~”

“Vania, do not invite bad luck! If you must make such comments, do so inside your head!”

Vania’s sentiment was an odd thing to say during working hours, so I cautioned her.

“Whaaat? Maybe it would be bad if I said there was nothing to do and started wandering around the building, but it’s not a problem if I’m just sitting in the office, right? And the autumn harvest is over now. We’re going to have less work moving forward anyway.”

It did not seem Vania was happy with my response. Fatla would understand what I was trying to say.

Moreover, Fatla was concentrating on her work on the opposite side of the room. I sensed her conscious refusal to participate in this conversation, though I knew she was listening to all of it.

“I know we do get periods of relative free time throughout the year, but there is work that must be done every day. That is why I am working now. And it would be unlucky to repeat what you just said.”

“I’m not cursed or anything! Do you get ghosts in this room? I can’t actually see ghosts.”

“No! It is not a good thing to remark on how idle you are! You are simply inviting more headaches!”

It was a strange thing; once we became aware of how idle or calm everything was, then an unbelievable amount of work would start coming our way.

I was aware that it was not a rule, but such situations often occurred.

When it came to things like this, it was much easier when I was at the bottom of the ladder. The breadth of my responsibilities back then was quite narrow.

Odd jobs that suddenly bubbled up or fell out of nowhere were usually not for the lowliest of the low to take care of, after all. They were for the most important people.

So now that I was the minister of agriculture, I was always alert, keeping an eye out for sudden showers of work.

“You’re a worrywart, boss. Fine, if we get a terrible job in the next

three days, then I'll treat you to a mea—"

The door suddenly flew open, and one of the department directors, a Cyclops, burst in.

"Miss Minister, this is an emergency! A dragon has made landfall on a farm to the east of the town around Vanzeld Castle! We need you there immediately!"

I clapped my hand onto Vania's back.

"I'm looking forward to that meal," I told her with a brilliant smile.

"Wait, no, that happened before I was done saying what I was going to say, so it's technically invalid—"

"You had essentially finished speaking, so it was a valid declaration. I am holding you to it."

Even if she did treat me to a nice meal, we still had an obnoxious job to take care of now...



The leviathan sisters and I made our way toward the eastern farmland.

It was just far enough for us to consider flying on one of them, but there was no space for them to take off or land, so we decided to fly on the back of a midsize wyvern. This was even faster.

Many people lived in the town around Vanzeld Castle, which shouldn't come as a surprise. It was the biggest demon city, after all. That meant we had to procure enough food to provide for the entire population.

It would be much too ineffective to import it from far away, which was why we had farmland right near the city.

This apparently was not exclusive to demons; I had read in some essay that there were pastoral regions around the outskirts of cities in the human world, too.

The location we were headed to was one of those farming regions.

"The weather is a bit cold today, but otherwise calm. I don't see how a dragon would have been downed in this."

On top of the wyvern, Fatla was flipping through some documents that she would be submitting soon.

"Dragons can fight fiercely over even the pettiest differences. 'Tis quite possible that a battle of sorts broke out somewhere, and they fled all the way here."

Though most dragons lived in human territory, there were some who lived in the demon lands. For the faster fliers, distance was not a problem at all.

"I don't really want to fight a dragon..." Vania had gone pale. What she ought to be worried about was the meal she owed me.

“You need not worry too much about that. Though dragons are often on bad terms with one another, they rarely cause fights with nondragons. According to the first report I received, ’twas only one who landed. They are not here to start a war.”

“You are quite calm about this. You truly have the presence of a minister.” The sudden compliment from Fatla was a little embarrassing

“There has been a lot of trouble, so I am used to it...”

As I thought about how little trouble a dragon would be, we spotted the eastern farms in the distance.

Right in the middle of it, I could see that a giant someone had skidded right through the farm, leaving a gash in the earth along the way.

“The leafy vegetables have been hit hard...”

We landed at the scene of the incident.

It was easy to see where our destination was—the dragon sat on the ground in their original form. Had they been in their human form, the inspection might have been more difficult.

The case worker on the ground led us to the drowsy-looking dragon. Dirt was caked on their chest, indicating they must have landed on their front.

“I am Beelzebub, agricultural minister. I take it the damage to this field came from you?”

“Yaaaaaaaaaaaaawn.”

They opened their mouth wide with exhaustion...which irritated me, to be honest.

“Yep. I, the great Flatorte of the blue dragons, am responsible. Yaaaaaawn.”

“Flatorte, you say? I hear blue dragons are particularly belligerent; were you fighting with another dragon? Did you fly all the way here?”

“No.” The dragon shook their head. “I’m behaving right now. I’m actually so bored that I sometimes end up sleeping all day.”

Now my hackles were up. *’Tis all your fault that I have more work now...*

“Then why have you done this? I would like to hear your side of the story.”

“Paaah~”

The dragon exhaled, and their breath reached our noses.

“Ugh! This dragon reeks of alcohol! They were flying under the influence!” Vania pinched her nose. Their breath alone was enough to make me tipsy.

“I had *nothing* to do, so I just drank and drank. I started in the late

afternoon, but I stopped before it got really late at night. After that, I decided to go flying to sober up, then I fell. *Yaaawn...*”

The dragon’s explanation was rather curious. There was a possibility that they were lying, so I had to listen carefully.

I did wish I could hand this beast over to the army and be done with it all... Why did they have to fall on a farm...?!

“I doubt a dragon can get drunk in the short period of time between ‘late afternoon’ and ‘before it got really late.’ Tell me the truth.”

“I’m not lying. Everyone knows Flatorte never lies! I’m just stupid!”

I did not see why the dragon would belittle himself like this...

“Then were you downing drinks in one go for an extended period of time?”

“I started drinking in the late afternoon four days ago, and I stopped last night.”

“That is *too* long of a drinking binge!”

Everyone who was listening was astonished. This was on another level.

“I mean, what else am I gonna do? Everyone’s so bored, there really isn’t much else to do but drink. Almost none of us blue dragons have jobs, y’see. And we don’t really do fussy stuff like labor ‘cause we’re big.”

Why did this unemployed dragon sound so haughty...?

“Flatorte, do you acknowledge that you are the one who caused damage to this farm?”

“Yeah. Not many could accomplish something so impressive. My rivals, the red dragons, could never do something like this.”

As I said, there is no need to be so haughty.

Fatla whispered to me, “She was right about being honest and stupid.”

I thought the same. “So you acknowledge your crime. Then if you are able, transform into your human form. ’Tis not easy to speak to one so big.”

“*Yaaawn*. Fine.”

The dragon changed into a human form—a girl with horns and a tail. She also wasn’t wearing anything at all.

“Hey! Why are you naked?!” I yelled.

“What?! You saw me naked?! You’re shameless!”

“Oh, give me a break! One typically wears clothing when going outside!”

“I think I took off my clothes while I was drinking ‘cause it got too

hot.”

Fatla whispered to me again, “She is an idiot.”

We all knew that; she did not need to tell me every time.

The dragon had covered her most private parts at first, but she quickly stopped caring and now arrogantly had her arms folded.

If she wanted to move to the demon lands, I would simply make up a reason to deny her... She could go bother the humans in the mountains...

“Someone fetch some undergarments and work clothes... And you there, bare-assed fool, you will have to pay compensation for the damage you have caused.”

“I don’t have any money. Blue dragons aren’t a bunch of gold-hoarding misers like the rest. That’s ’cause we use any money we get right away! *Savings are for the weak*, as we say!”

If she and her people were not such a hardy species, they would have died out ages ago...

“Hmm... Then you can work off the damages on the farm.”

“Is it ’cause I ruined it? When I felt myself falling, I thought it was perfect that there was such soft-looking ground beneath me, too...”

She deliberately aimed for the fields! Could she get any worse?!

“No matter how much you hate labor, I will put you to work until you have paid back the damages. I hope you are ready for that.”

“Leave it to me, the great Flatorte. Actually, I picked fights with about fifty-five other blue dragons while I was drunk, so I was hoping to lie low somewhere until that blew over. Perfect timing.”

“Why so many?!”

I never knew how dangerous a blue dragon on a bender could be until now!

“Anyway, put together a work program suitable for this nincompoop,” I ordered Fatla. “That will be the end to our work here, then.”

“Understood. She’s a dragon, so she should survive a bit of harsh treatment.”

What a terrifying thing to say with a straight face...

“And if she loses control again, there will be more damage. It does not seem the blue dragons have any form of government or unions, so our only choice is to have her work and repay us. Put together a program that is just tough enough, but still one that will give her a sense of accomplishment.”

I did not know what Fatla was truly thinking, but—

“I will start on this immediately.”

—she replied just as a staffer of mine should.

“Then let’s return to the ministry,” I said.

“I’m glad it didn’t turn out to be that much extra work~”

I gripped Vania's hand with a smile. "I haven't forgotten about that meal."

No matter what she thought, I was going to make sure she kept her word.

"O-okay... I'll manage something! I take pride in my cooking!"

I wished she could take pride in her office work, too.



Over the weekend, I paid my first visit to the leviathan sisters' house.

Fatla came to pick me up and take me there, and I learned they lived much closer to the office than I'd thought.

"A lovely home, but a bit smaller than a leviathan's original size."

"It is only the two of us here. The rest of our family lives in our hometown."

"I see. I suppose you selected this more for an easy commute than for size."

"And leviathans are much too big naturally, so a smaller house feels more secure and puts us at ease."

"I cannot tell if that is true for all leviathans, or if that is just particular to you..."

When the door opened, Vania emerged wearing a white outfit that looked similar to a chef's uniform.

Indeed—when Vania had said she would treat me, she had not once mentioned going to a restaurant. She would be showing off the cooking skills she was so proud of.

"Welcome to our fine establishment today. I am Vania, head chef of our restaurant, Sea-Drinking Whale."

"Head chef? You are the only one cooking here."

"You must be Beelzebub with the reservation, yes? I see you have ordered the Chef's Surprise Lunch for one today."

It seemed she was going to stick with the restaurant story through and through. I did not mind, but—

"*Surprise* lunch?! Wouldn't *select* lunch be better?! It sounds as if your meal could either be fantastic or a total flop! This isn't a gambling den!"

"No need to worry. We have prepared all our ingredients ahead of time, and we will only be serving dishes we know will be excellent."

So this wasn't a "select" lunch or a "surprise" lunch... Ah, no matter. All this complaining ultimately felt rather pointless

I was brought to the dining room and served dish after dish—

—and they were all absolutely perfect, both in taste and appearance!

The vegetables in my salad were even stacked in a three-

dimensional pattern; I could scarcely believe that the airheaded Vania could have made such a thing.

“Today’s theme is *towers falling*. We used seasonal vegetables to create the image of an old, crumbling tower. Please enjoy!”

“I cannot say this is a particularly auspicious theme... But the level of skill exhibited in each of these dishes is magnificent.”

Now that I was the minister of agriculture, I often had dinner meetings at fancy restaurants, so I could say her food was on par with those establishments.

The meat was perfectly grilled, and she did not cut corners when it came to the side vegetables, either.

“It’s rather odd that you haven’t opened your own restaurant...,” I began, but then I hesitated.

I would be sad if she said with confidence, *Then I will quit my job and go off on my own*.

“Ah-ha-ha. I could never run a restaurant~” But Vania loosely waved her hand.

I was surprised that she would refuse so easily. “Hmm? Are the hurdles you set for yourself that high when it comes to running your own establishment? Are you unwilling to be anything less than the best of the best?”

“Oh, no. If I opened a restaurant, then I’d need the skills to run the business side, too~ No way could I do that. I’d close in a year~”

“I suppose you do have some semblance of self-awareness. But are you certain?!”

“My sis always tried to discourage me. So one day, I got so mad that I bought a book on starting a restaurant.”

Ah yes, after Vania worked on renovating the cafeteria a little while ago, she had wanted to quit, but Fatla had stopped her by saying she would never succeed.

“I fell asleep reading the foreword.”

“You break down much too quickly! I am certain the author is disappointed!”

I had a feeling that the business side of things would turn out all right if Fatla joined her as an adviser, but then both of them would resign... I chose to say nothing.

“It is perfect for my sister to cook only when she wants to, Lady Beelzebub,” Fatla said, sitting across from me. “I am certain if she made it her job, her hobby would soon lose the joy it gives her. I believe our current situation suits her best.”

Vania was nodding, too. The older sister knew her younger sister well—keeping hobbies as hobbies was a valid approach to life.

“And sometimes, if you work at a restaurant, then you’ll have to work really late, right? But people from fancier restaurants still need

to wake up early to beat the rush and get their hands on good ingredients. Such long hours would only cause me to make lots of mistakes~”

“Ah yes... I suppose you are better off not doing that.”

I could see her restaurant becoming infamous for serving customers the wrong dishes...

That aside...I got to visit my underlings' house, so perhaps this dragon business wasn't all so bad after all.



One month later, I was at the eastern farms.

Parts of the field were still a mess, but the places that had been truly ruined were now reborn as new fields.

“Well? Whatcha think? I worked pretty hard, huh?”

The blue dragon stood in her work clothes with an expression of pride, waiting for us to compliment her.

“Did you plough this all on your own?” I was shocked by how much ground she had covered.

Though I knew dragons were strong, I had not imagined she would do this much.

“Obviously. With demons and other outsiders around, you end up joining in the ploughing, too. The ground was kind of hard, but it made the work feel worth it. When I started thinking about it as exercise instead of labor, all the pain went away.”

Ah—whether a task is viewed as work or not would make a big difference.

It was similar to Vania's case, where her cooking hobby would no longer be fun if she were to make it her job.

The most likely explanation was that while the blue dragons hated being forced into a job, they would enthusiastically take on things that they enjoyed. I believed that was how money came about for them, too. Doing nothing would lead to a most boring life.

“Hey, demon, what about all the damages payments?”

“Ah...yes. I believe it has been compensated.” My reply came a little late since I had been thinking. “I might have to pay you a salary instead.”

“I don't need that. I had fun. Maybe I'll come hang out here in the demon lands sometimes.” The blue dragon cackled. “Honest yet stupid” indeed.

“Vanzeld will always welcome you whenever you would like to visit.”

“Maybe I'll fall around here again.”

“Do *not* do that!”

We could not afford to have a dragon constantly falling in the town around the castle!

After the dragon had a quick meal in the farm shed, she assumed her dragon form and took off into the sky. She did not even really say good-bye. I suppose that was simply how dragons were.

“Dragons are rather unusual characters, aren’t they?” I murmured, looking up at her as she vanished into the sky.

Then I found something on the ground near the house.

“Oh, this—”

I picked up the dirtied article and immediately knew what it was.

“—is the work uniform she was wearing...”

The dragon had gone home without any clothes on.

“So she went home naked... I suppose she is in her dragon form, though...”

She would not be able to enter her house in her dragon form, so I could imagine her nakedness creating trouble. Still, she would manage, I’m sure.



Her Majesty Stayed Over



The central demon conference was a meeting where the royal family, all the ministers, and other demons of great influence came together in the same hall.

This conference took place once every three years and, by some definitions, was the single most important event in demon politics.

It was here that the demons' future and goals would be decided.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Agriculture had proposed a project that would transform a vast wasteland into arable land. As expensive as it was, it would need the permission of this conference in order to proceed.

As the leader of the Ministry of Agriculture, I watched the conference with enthusiasm.

This project was inevitable for the demons' agricultural policy!

I would have it approved, no matter what!

In the end—

“In regard to the Ministry of Agriculture's proposal, I think it's fine. I doubt there are any objections, hmm~? ♪”

—with an easygoing tone, Her Majesty let it pass like a breeze.

Fatla leaned over and whispered to me, “Many people think of you as Her Majesty's favorite, Lady Beelzebub. No one will go out of their way to say no.”

“I believe I am more of a favorite *toy*...”

Though I would still be grateful for the demon king lending me her power, even if indirectly.

The conference proceeded smoothly afterward. Eventually, it became time to talk about the events Her Majesty would be involved in. Whether it was in public or private, everything she did held great meaning.

“I would like to carry out a few royal visitations. It's been ever so long, ♪” she said.

To put it simply, a royal visitation was when Her Majesty would come to the homes of important political figures and have them entertain her.

Though the hosts did need to spend money, a visitation had been considered a great honor throughout demon history.

And since only the most powerful nobles with money, land, and pedigree ever hosted, the visit would not create any economic burden.

Well, I was certain such an honor would never fall upon an upstart noble such as—

“This time, I would like to stay at Miss Beelzebub’s house~ ♪”

Everyone present at the meeting turned to look at me.

“Whaaaaat?!”

This felt...exactly the same as when I was made minister...

The powerful nobles started protesting immediately.

“Your Majesty, if I may, the houses that are generally made a part of the royal visitation have been established through a long tradition...”

“Oh, it’s all right~ Precedent is meant to be overturned~ ♪”

“No, I *also* think that this is impossible!”

I turned her down as well. I did not want to get swallowed up in another one of her schemes.

And my manor...was a mess.

It was not as though the rooms I typically used were full of garbage, no. I had grown a bit since I was at the bottom of the ladder.

But I did not even enter rooms that fell outside my living space, so they were all filled with dust...

What else should I have done? I did not have a single servant to my name, so I had no use for this mansion I had been given. If I were to use every space on my own, then I would end up cleaning all day, every day. So I decided to live within a limited number of rooms on the first floor.

Of course, I had done nothing to care for the massive garden, either. I could not even begin to name what sorts of plants and animals were living there now. From my window, all I could see was a dense forest.

A royal visitation was a proper event; it would not be over with a quick five-minute chat at the front door. Manners dictated that the host guide the demon king through the manor, prepare a meal, and even show her around the garden.

I could never do such a thing!

And so I would not let her settle on this.

“Your Majesty, my abode is an embarrassment compared with the noble houses of old. I appreciate the offer, but I must decline...”

“Hmm, I see. I suppose it’s your prerogative.”

Oh, that was easier than I thought.

“By the way, I’ve realized there might be a problem with the Ministry of Agriculture’s project after all, so I may have to reconsider

it~”

She was taking the ministry project hostage!

Her Majesty was grinning.

Oh. Once she decided something was going to happen, she was going to make it happen at any cost. I knew my fate.

“Y-yes, Your Majesty...,” I said weakly.

Countless staff members of the Ministry of Agriculture had ceded so much of their time for this project. If I had to sacrifice myself to save it, then so be it!

Once the conference was over, Fatla tapped me on the shoulder to encourage me.

“Lady Beelzebub, you made a wise decision.”

“Decisions begin and end quickly. What happens next is the problem...”



Even when the date for the royal visitation was set, I felt no motivation to make any preparations. They meant nothing at this point.

The cleaning, I could manage. But the rest of the hosting duties required manpower, and that I did not have. I could not hire amateur extras, either. I needed a whole roster of people knowledgeable in etiquette; otherwise, they could not even participate.

But the people I was considering were all employed by the pedigreed nobles, and I would never be allowed to borrow them.

And so my only choice was to wait for Her Majesty, empty-handed...

It would be an embarrassment, but it was not a sin. I would accept the shame.

Almost three weeks until my moment of disgrace...

Fate, however, was on my side. About ten days before the visitation, something happened.

“Boss, boss! This is bad!”

Vania, who had gone to deliver some documents to other departments, came running back into the office.

“Must you make so much noise?”

“Her Majesty is sick with the stubborn demon cold!”

The stubborn demon cold was a mild but irritating illness whose symptoms lasted for a whole month.

“All the events on her calendar for the next month have been canceled!”

“Yesss!”

There was nothing more disrespectful than cheering for the demon king being sick, but that was how I honestly felt. Even the demon king could fall ill, and how grateful I was for that!

“Now the visitation will be called off!”

“But you know how Her Majesty is, Lady Beelzebub. She may come to visit once she’s better.”

Fatla reminded me the world was not as kind as I thought it was. I had already considered that, of course.

“She has already given us permission for our wasteland-to-farmland project! She may be a royal, but she cannot go back in time and retract her approval! We have no hostage to worry about anymore!”

It was as though a test one did not study for was suddenly canceled.

When Her Majesty was feeling better, I would accompany her shopping or something similar.



On the day the visit was originally scheduled for, I went to work as normal and returned home as normal.

I entered my room and splayed out over the bed, stretching my arms and legs.

“Ahhh, what a wonderful thing to keep all the work I am spearheading.”

Perhaps I would laze about for the rest of the day, take a bath, and go to sleep. It felt like receiving paid time off. If the visitation were to have happened today, I could have easily spent another twenty hours cleaning on top of my office work.

However, when I was in bed and reading a book—

Klang, klang.

—the bell rang to signify a guest had arrived, echoing especially loud in the night.

I glanced at the clock to see it was nine.

“Who could it be...? Solicitations at night are illegal.”

Dubiously, I went out to the gate, and—

“Why are you here, Your Majesty?!”

—the visitor was unmistakably the demon king, though she was hiding her identity with a hood.

“*Cough, cough...* Today is the day of the visita—I mean, of our sleepover, though...”



“Your cold has not gotten any better at all!”

Her Majesty tried to force herself to smile, but she was too unwell; the smile came out strained.

“Oh, I know I’m...cough...sick...”

In the end, I brought Her Majesty to my bedroom.

I had no other rooms with a bed. Strictly speaking, there were other rooms within the manor that did count as guest rooms, but there was enough dust in them to make a healthy person sick.

I laid her down in the bed. She was sweating, but I had a feeling that the best way to go about this was to warm her up and let her sweat it out. I pulled up the covers as well.

“I feel all dizzy just coming this way~”

“Of course you do. ’Tis what happens when you walk around outside while ill.”

I placed the wet towel I had prepared over her forehead.

“But I believe this could be an opportunity on its own...” Exhausted, the demon king smiled.

“For what? An opportunity to worsen your cold, perhaps.”

“My candidate for the role of my elder sister will be taking care of me, that’s what~ Eh-heh-heh...”

Then I realized why I had been chosen for the visitation.

“The little-sister figure sleeping over at the big-sister figure’s house—so that’s what you wanted to do.”

“Yes, yes. I see you know well~”

I was appalled. *I cannot believe I was so anxious over something so insignificant.*

“Allow me to confirm just one thing, Your Majesty, but do the people at the castle know about this? You have not simply left of your own accord, have you?”

“They do. I made an excuse that I had to run an errand~”

So her errand was coming here to rest, was it?

She was always so meticulous with her jokes.

“What you are doing is quite reckless, but I suppose I appreciate your enthusiasm.” I wiped away the sweat at the nape of Her Majesty’s neck. “Very well. I shall stay up to look after you, so get some rest.”

“Thank you very much, Elder Sister.” The demon king smiled in delight. “Despite all your complaints, you would do everything you could for your little sister~ You do have the makings of an elder sister.”

“Even if you were not my ‘little sister,’ any vassal would do the same if the demon king showed up sick at their doorstep.”

“So cruel, Elder Sister.”

“I am not your elder sister,” I shot back.

The towel quickly grew warm, so I swapped it out with a cold one.

“Ah, it’s so nice and cool.”

“You should keep your eyes closed. You’ll fall asleep soon enough if you do.”

“Aww, but this is our sleepover. I want to chat with you~ What a waste it would be if I slept all our time away~”

“Your cold will only get worse, so you must—”

No, this sort of conversation would go on forever. I might tell her to sleep, but of course, she would not listen. In fact, it might instead give her the energy to be even more stubborn.

It was quite embarrassing, but...I suppose it was time to try acting as an older sister. If I satisfied Her Majesty that way, she might fall asleep.

I leaned in close to her ear.

“Get some rest now, Pecora,” I said in my smoothest voice.

Her Majesty’s ears went bright-red, and her smile disappeared. It seems I gave her a shock.

And ’twas a good thing, too—if she’d had a comeback, I had no other tricks up my sleeve.

“A-all right... I shall do as you say, Elder Sister...”

“Yes, good girl. Don’t make me worry.”

Even saying it was rather embarrassing... But I would persevere.

Now, how about that?! That was my plan. Perhaps she would listen to orders if they were coming from her older sister...

Her Majesty closed her eyes and spoke no more. A little while later, I started to hear her soft snores.

Yes, my plan was perfect. I did not wish to do such a thing a second time...

I placed both my hands on the wall to support myself, panting.

“That was painful... What punishment is this...? I suppose it was exactly what she wanted to hear...”

All that was left was for me to watch over her the whole night. It was not going to be easy, but it was nothing compared with the line I had to deliver earlier.

I went to fetch water for the wet towels.

“Perhaps I should wash my own face, too...” It was burning up, after all.



Her Majesty awoke early the next morning. I suppose it was because

she had fallen asleep so early the night before.

“Good morning, Miss Beelzebub—no, Elder Sister.”

She was in a good mood from the moment she opened her eyes.

“Good morning, Your Majesty.” I gave her the vassal’s bow beside the bed.

“What? Aren’t you going to call me Pecora?”

“I do not know of what you speak. You must have had some strange dreams due to your cold.”

I had decided to blatantly dodge the topic. There was no proof of what had happened anyway.

“What? What?! That is not true! You called me Pecora right before I went to sleep! You said, *Good night, my dear Pecora!*”

That was even worse than what I actually said!

“I said no such thing!”

I decided to dig in my heels and feign complete ignorance.

There would be a great deal of trouble if Her Majesty remained away from the castle, so I took her back. I carried her the whole way, too, so that she wouldn’t collapse on me.

“Oh, bridal style~”

“I would appreciate it if you would not use such phrases.”

“You did call me Pecora yesterday, didn’t you, Elder Sister?”

“I cannot recall doing such a thing, no. Your symptoms seem to be quite severe. Please take care of yourself.”

The castle guards seemed shocked when they saw Her Majesty and me, but—

“I just made sure to carry out the visitation as scheduled, ♪” Her Majesty said, and they appeared to accept that answer. They seemed accustomed to her unreasonable behavior.

One way or another, I managed to return her to her own room.

That was quite a long journey...

“Thank you so much for escorting me all the way back, Miss Beelzebub. ♪” Her Majesty offered her thanks just outside her room.

“Oh, think nothing of it. I am delighted to see that your cough is less noticeable than yesterday,” I responded with a smile. It was a relief knowing my job was done.

“Please feel free to call me Pecora again—”

“You are quite insistent about that, aren’t you? I haven’t the slightest clue what you are talking about.” I rebuffed her flatly, so she pouted like a child.

“You are so rigid!”

“You simply rely too much on shortcuts.”

It seemed that at this point, she understood she was not going to get her way. A firm attitude is crucial to dealing with these things.

“Well, I suppose that’s all right. It is like you to never do entirely

what I want, after all.”

Rrrgh... She would always turn things to her favor, wouldn't she...?

“Now then, I have work to attend to at the ministry, so I must be off.” I bowed, turned away, proceeded down the corridor—

—and suddenly started to cough.

“Cough, cough, cough, cough! Cough!”

Now that I thought about it, I felt rather hot. And my head was heavy. Was it the all-nighter...?

My face has been hot since yesterday...

I had just experienced a triple whammy—the possibility that I'd caught Her Majesty's cold after being with her all night, the weakness of being awake for so long, and the immense relaxation once the burden of returning Her Majesty to the castle had been lifted from my shoulders...

That day, I went to the ministry, applied for paid time off due to how unwell I felt, and went home.



I Want a Bit of Decoration in My Office

Skrtch skrtch, skrtch.

Fatla was writing something in pen, and the sound resonated through the minister's office. The noise was quiet, but this room was so echoey for some reason. Why did they build it like this?

I doubted I would be able to hear the pen if Vania and I were talking, but Vania was presently working in silence. I felt no need to speak, either, so the room was utterly quiet.

In a way, we were spending our time at the office properly.

Yet on the other hand, the pen sounded rather loud in the silence. In fact, the silence was so intense that I could not concentrate.

I once thought that phrase was a way of avoiding responsibility, but it felt a bit too on the nose right now. It weighed on my mind.

But when I looked around the room again—

It's quite bleak in here, isn't it?

There were desks for work and shelves of documents—a given, considering this was an office. I was not about to complain. On the other hand, there was nothing else. Perhaps the door, windows, and curtains counted as exceptions, but essentially, there was nothing but the bare minimum required for work.

Of course, it did not hinder my work, but it was much too simple, no? This was not a factory where suits of armor and dolls that moved by magical means were working. This was an office used by three high-ranking demons.

Oh, just thinking about it was extremely irritating... And the sound of that damned pen seemed much louder now! Once I noticed it, I could not get it out of my mind!

Wham! I slammed my hands on my desk and stood.

“Fatla, Vania, I have a query for you!”

“What is it, Lady Beelzebub?”

“Are you growing into a cranky old lady, boss?”

No, I was not.

“Don’t you think this room is a little too bland? There is nothing here, nothing at all to say what sort of people work in this office, no? Yes, they should know a minister works here, but why don’t we add a bit of our own personal touch?”

“I suppose one could surmise that the demons who work here have no hobbies,” Fatla paused from her work to say, but—

“Does that not make you sad?” I asked.

“A bit.”

—she also seemed to acknowledge the joke at her own expense.

“I know only the three of us use this room on normal workdays, but plenty of other demons from other departments come to consult you here in this room. I doubt we will be able to bring in anything that is clearly not meant for work,” said Fatla.

“I am not saying we will be putting in games. But there is nothing in here that shows character, not even a desktop calendar of cute little animals.”

That seemed like something Vania would do, but there was practically nothing feminine about her desk. There was nothing on it but messy piles of paper.

“Is this not the room for the head of the Ministry of Agriculture? Why do we not have at least something related to agriculture in here? At minimum, should we not put up a painting of a farming scene? Or posters of fruits and vegetables?”

“I understand the sentiment. However, I am against the posters. I believe that will cheapen the atmosphere of this room and make it feel less like what it is, which is our office,” Fatla replied with a rather powerful criticism.

“I—I suppose you’re right...”

It was hard to tell by looks alone, but Fatla was the most feminine of the three of us. Especially compared with me and Vania.

That was one reason why this room was so bleak.

“Placing one or two paintings in this room will not change its mood very much. I have heard that other ministerial offices have paintings, but I do not think that is what makes their offices so beautiful. They barely bring any color.”

“A-aye... I suppose you’re right... There are paintings by the first-floor entrance, but it still feels like a normal office...”

If we put one here, it might only emphasize how much it was an office.

“But I understand what you’re trying to say, boss~ There’s no green in here. A decorative plant might be nice to have~”

“Yes indeed!”

That was a good idea, Vania!

“A decorative plant! We will add green to this room that way! I

hear indoor plants help one relax, and it will not harm the image of the ministerial office!”

But there was still a problem.

Vania pulled out a catalog for equipment and supplies, then flipped to the indoor-plants page. “Oh wow, they’re expensive~”

I peered at the page as well, and they all cost so much that I was tempted to drop the idea and go with something else.

“They all cost this much...? Just for one...? A single lonely plant in the corner hardly seems like enough... Mmm, are there more pages for plants near the front? ’Tis cheaper over there.”

Vania had opened to the pages displaying midpriced plants, apparently.

“But the minister’s office shouldn’t have a cheap plant~ We need a big one.”

“You are right on that account...”

It was not just my femininity but also my dignity as minister that I had to protect.

Our plan to get a nice indoor plant quickly ran aground.

“Oh well. I suppose I shall give up on decorating and bringing color into this room. We are demons anyway; perhaps the bleak decor is more appropriate for us.”

But then—

“*Sigh...*”

The sound was borderline contemptuous, and it came from Fatla.

“If you do not mind my personal articles, I believe I will be able to transform this space into one befitting the Ministry of Agriculture. I am rather knowledgeable about plants, you see.”

“Are you now?! Perhaps I will ask you to do so, then!”

Fatla’s own personal items would not cost us money, so it was two birds with one stone.

But Vania seemed worried, which in turn worried me a tinge.

Well, this is Fatla taking the helm; it could not be too big of a failure.



The weekend was over. I went to work at the ministry as I always did and pushed against the door to the minister’s office.

This door always felt a bit heavier at the start of the week. I knew it was a mental thing, but it had not changed in the years I’d worked here.

It was a little different today, however.

“Hrm... ’Tis truly heavy today...”

I pushed with both hands, but it still did not open. Was someone

pushing on the other side?

“Oy, Vania! You’ve done something again, haven’t you?! You don’t want me to see, so you’re pressing against the door, aren’t you?!”

“No! Please, please don’t blame me for this! I haven’t taken part in this at all!” Vania was pleading false charges.

“Then why does this door not open?!”

“Oh, I’m sorry. It’s caught on a shelf.”

A shelf? Did we have a shelf in front of the door?

“I moved it, so it’s all right now. Come in.”

I once again pushed against the door, and it opened easily this time.

But this was not the office I recognized—there were several shelves placed throughout the room. On each separate area sat little glass containers.

Plenty had dirt or rocks in them, so I wondered if they were sets for raising insects. None were lidded, so it must have been for something else.

“What is this, Fatla? Hell’s bells, what on earth...?”

I rarely found myself so completely clueless. What was she putting on display?

“Decorative indoor plants,” Fatla said, as though I should not have even asked.

“What? What about these things are plants...? All these containers are very cute, but they are full of dirt and stones...”

“Can’t you see? They all contain moss.”

When she said that, I finally understood the purpose of the containers.

There was moss!

Moss in the dirt!

Moss on the rocks!

Moss in the artificial beach in the container!

“Wait, wait! This isn’t it... This is moss, not decorative—”

“Do you mean to say moss is not an indoor plant? I am afraid you are incorrect,” Fatla replied with unusual firmness. She was not spoiling for a fight, but she was upset that I disapproved of her moss.

Then I recalled how uneasy Vania had looked last week.

“Um, boss... Sis likes to collect and cultivate moss...,” Vania said, exhausted.

I see she had been forced to help with the shelves.

In the meantime, Fatla pointed to the container of moss right in front of me.

“Lady Beelzebub, please look inside. Moss is so small, but upon closer inspection, you can see it has leaves. Cute, is it not? It’s like a

miniature. Each individual glass container is its own pocket garden.”

“Well, cuteness is in the eye of the beholder...”

I could say there was something fashionably modern about putting dirt or rocks into a little container and growing moss in it. And a little feminine, I suppose.

If I were to place one on my desk, the simple decorative pocket garden might even relieve some of my tension.

However—

“There are too many of them! The whole space at the front of the room is filled with shelves! What is this, a moss shop?!”

“We would need at least this many to bring life to this dreary room.”

Fatla was holding something—was that a mist bottle?

With a quick spritz, she watered the moss in the container.

The green of the shriveled moss appeared to brighten up.

“Oh! You gave it a little more life, didn’t you?”

“Indeed. The moss waits patiently until it receives water. And then once it does, it flourishes. Are you not proud of them? Are they not adorable?”

“Everything comes back to the cuteness factor...”

Fatla retrieved something else that looked like a round piece of glass.

“You can see the moss up close with this. You’ll be fascinated by what you can observe. Here, Lady Beelzebub. Give it a go.”

I didn’t exactly have the option to refuse, so I examined the moss with it.

“Oh! Up close, I can see the tiny leaves. ’Tis indeed a plant!”

“Of course. A world too small for us to know is still filled with life. Within this little garden, there might even be nations inhabited by the tiniest creatures. Does it not fill your heart with wonder?”

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Fatla's eyes were full of life, too, gleaming even brighter than the freshly misted moss.

She took this very seriously...

Fatla was the type to rarely speak of her own hobbies, but now I knew what she liked. I saw a new side to one of my staff today. One will always make new discoveries.

"But do you not think this much moss would get in the way of—?"

"With all due respect, we cannot say that for sure."

The look on Fatla's face told me that she would firmly fight me on this.

"...Indeed. Our desks are not being overwhelmed, so I suppose it will be fine like this."

"Thank you." Fatla bowed politely.

She certainly was stubborn when it came to moss. I suppose everyone has a "thing"...



And so the minister's office had been reborn into a green environment.

It did not take long for others around the building to start secretly calling us the moss office.

Hrm, well, I suppose I don't mind... There was enough greenery around us that it was almost off-putting, but seeing it every day did start to give me a greater sense of attachment.

Now and again, Fatla would spritz the moss with her mist bottle, but it did not hinder her work.

The one problem was that the only space to walk was between the shelves; reaching the corridor from my desk was rather troublesome, but it was not so bad that I could not bear with it.

"Boss, I decided to raise some moss myself!" After a little while, Vania decided to put a little moss garden on her desk as well.

"Aye, 'tis not a bad thing to raise another creature yourself. It will not immediately perish if you forget to feed it, so I feel it is perfectly suited for you."

"You're making fun of me, aren't you?"

"I would not dream of it."

Even I started to consider raising some moss myself.

After several days of rain, I arrived at work feeling as though the room had been rearranged. The shelves of moss were between the desk and door as they always had been; nothing in particular had changed.

I doubt I would notice if all the little containers were flipped around; I did not think it was such a small change as that.

“Fatla. The room feels somewhat different than usual today. Have you done anything to it?”

“No, I haven’t touched anything.”

Fatla was not the type to lie, and if she had added another container of moss after all this time, she had no reason to hide it.

“Oh, I thought something was a little different today, too. I don’t know—I feel way more relaxed than I usually am.” It seemed Vania thought the same.

“Are you certain you are not simply being influenced by my comments?”

“Of course not! I thought of it myself! There is definitely something new about the room today!” she said with confidence.

“Then why is it you feel something is new about it?”

“I don’t know!”

Why do you sound so confident?

But it was true, then, that the room had changed. I could feel it in my bones. Then again, we had not changed the carpet, nor had we painted the walls.

And then there was another thing to add to the list of oddities.

“I am working at such a terrible pace today...”

I had been working as normal, but I was much less efficient about it.

“You too, Lady Beelzebub? My work is going quite slow as well.” Fatla seemed a bit troubled. “I feel far more relaxed than I am willing to be—suddenly, I come to my senses and realize I’ve been resting. I am having trouble buckling down to work.”

“How strange. Hmm, wait a moment...” A terrible possibility came to mind. “Is any of the moss in this room poisonous?”

“Impossible,” Fatla replied readily. “Some may be harmful to eat, but cultivating moss will never create poisonous gases. And I have heard that a good majority of the moss are too unappetizing to eat. You never hear about them being used in cooking, do you?”

“Now that you mention it...”

Perhaps I was overthinking it? Still, there *was* something wrong with this room.

Broadly speaking, it felt like it was almost too bright in here. So much brighter and more colorful than the green of the moss.

Due to Fatla’s and my malaise, Vania’s desk was piled high with documents. It almost resembled what our desks looked like after a vacation.

“Come now, Vania, get it together.”

“Boss, I’m way less effective today, too... Whenever I try to work,

I lose all my motivation.”

“Are you sure you are not simply being careless?!”

Right at that moment, something fell onto Vania’s documents.

“Vania, your papers... They’re emerald-green!”

Yes, there was something fuzzy on them, a truly beautiful and brilliant green.

“Hmm? I’ve never seen moss like this before~ Sis, what kind is this?” Vania showed the paper to Fatla.

At that moment, a look of panic spread across Fatla’s face. A rare sight indeed.

She opened her mouth, and her voice quavered.

“That is not moss. That’s mold!”

Oh no...

I slowly turned my gaze up toward the ceiling.

The whole surface was covered in emerald-green fuzz!

Then I heard the sound of the rain drizzling outside.

“The humidity! Not only have we saturated this room for the moss, but the rain dampened the area even more! ’Twas perfect for mold!”

“...I may be mistaken, but I believe this is the laziness-and-lethargy mold. Its spores affect a creature’s mental capacity and takes away their desire to work. We should not be breathing in this air...”

I pressed my hand against my mouth and stood up.

“Everyone, out of this room immediately! Before you lose all motivation!”

But Vania had already planted her face onto her desk and was snoring soundly. She had put her face too close to the paper when the clump of mold fell on it!

I pinched Vania’s face.

“Stay awake! If you fall asleep, you may never wake up again!”

“Mmmm... Don’t wanna work...”

“Lady Beelzebub, let us leave Vania for now and get out of here! We can save her later!”

But when we made our way to the door, Fatla made such a ruckus as she walked. “I can hardly move. These shelves are in the way!”

Never block the passageway to the exit—you’ll regret it in an emergency!

“Who put these here?!” she cried.

“You did! You clearly did!”

In the end, we were forbidden from using the minister’s office

until the mold was cleared away—and all the moss shelves had been removed from the revitalized room.

As I gazed at the refreshingly dreary room, I murmured, “Safety over decorations...”

I would make sure we did not place anything that blocked the evacuation route...

“Indeed. I will settle for just one thing on my desk.”

One of Fatla’s proud moss pocket-gardens sat on her desk. Perhaps that was the perfect amount of decor for a room like this.



Going on Dates with Her Majesty on My Days Off



It was one of my days off.

Holding hands, Her Majesty and I walked through a human village.

The market was especially interesting; what the humans had on sale was completely different from what we sold in the demon lands. That difference was partially due to culture, yes, but also the climate. The indigenous plants and animals were nothing like what I knew.

But I didn't mind that so much—at least, not compared with my holding hands with a certain someone.

"Ah, Your Majesty?" I whispered.

I didn't want others to hear she was royalty, much less the demon king. There were more and more demons visiting the human lands recently, so the humans wouldn't be as terrified as they would have been back when I first became the minister of agriculture. Yet the name of the demon king still had a lot of impact.

I doubted any humans would even believe she was the demon king.

"Yes, what is it, Miss Beelzebub?"

"Is it all right if we let go of our hands now?"

"Awww, of course not. You can't have me getting swept away in the crowd," said the demon king, wearing a hood to hide her horns.

I was also wearing a hood as my basic disguise. My horns were so long that the hood was sticking up in a decidedly unnatural fashion, but it was better than nothing.

"Still, I am off duty today, so strictly speaking, it is not within my realm of responsibility to look after you, Your Majesty. If you are worried about getting lost, then you may as well stay in the castle."

But I couldn't just leave the demon king alone, so my protests were ultimately empty.

"Gosh! Don't say things like that!" Her Majesty tugged on my hand, dragging me in a different direction.

"Fine, fine. There was a nice café over that way, so let's go there. Do be a proper escort, please."

“I still have things I would like to see.”

“Please allow the young girl’s opinion to take priority.”

“I am biologically female as well, might I remind you.”

She answered with an especially insistent tug not even I could resist, and we escaped the flow of people.

“*Sigh*, you still have no idea of the proper way to treat me, Miss Beelzebub. On a scale of one to ten, you’d be a three,” Her Majesty complained over tea.

“But conversely, this means you trust me enough to give your honest opinion of me. This is the highest honor.”

“My, but how eloquent you are. You really have grown into your position as a minister.”

She was looking at me reproachfully, but this was no different from usual. It would be even more worrying if she never felt like she could say anything.

“You’ve been there nearly two full centuries now, alas. You are getting strangely good at it. It was much more interesting when you were new.”

“Yes. We’ve been in office for the same amount of time, Your Majesty. Your general reputation is that you’ve gotten rather good at your job, too.”

We drank tea as we conversed.

Human tea was rather weak. Personally, I would prefer something just a tad spicier, but one of the rules of a seasoned traveler was to accept the flavors of the destination.

“I had planned to mold you into the absolutely perfect elder sister for me after holding the position of agricultural minister for so long. I failed in your training.”

I brought the teacup to my mouth, feigning ignorance.

We’d had this conversation dozens of times now, perhaps even hundreds.

“I would rather not take on a leadership role relative to you. I know that your goal with someone like that is to have them wrapped around your finger.”

“That’s not it at all~ And I mean it! You can’t refuse because you would find it a nuisance if you were at my whims! An elder sister must be on her feet at all times caring for her little sister, but also strict when circumstances call for it. And the little sister is to be inspired by her elder sister. Doesn’t a spiritual pseudosistership like that sound lovely?!”

“I believe I’ve told you this many times now, but I don’t understand it at all. I am simply thankful that you brought me up into the position of agricultural minister. You also gained another close

adviser, so I believe this is a win-win.”

“You wouldn’t know romance if it bit you on the nose, would you, Miss Beelzebub?”

“Indeed. One who spends her holidays drinking and lazing about alone hardly has the chance to become familiar with the concept.”

I had started gaining much more out of life once I’d become minister, compared with my stint as a bottom-tier bureaucrat.

I had established my power as the agricultural minister, and the demon king was the same. It would not be an exaggeration to say this was the most the demon world had developed in history. We were much more advanced than any human nation.

And if I didn’t end up at the beck and call of my ruler, even better...

“I planned to use as my close adviser someone who wasn’t on the career track, like you are, and I succeeded—but your individual development has gone way beyond what I was expecting. I cannot have my way.”

“Cannot have your way? Well, neither can I, since I’ve had to make time for you on one of my few days off. Traveling is one of my hobbies, and I would love to have the chance to fully enjoy it.”

“I cannot have this anymore.” Her Majesty abruptly stood from her chair.

Then she finished the rest of the tea in her cup before slowly placing it back on the table.

“Today, you will be acting entirely as my escort! First, you will accompany me on my shopping!”

I placed my elbows on the table, knowing full well it was rude. “Shopping, Your Majesty? You don’t have anything you want, do you?”

“So what if I don’t? I specifically mean the act of shopping itself. You have no feminine sensibilities when it comes to these things, my dear Beelzebub.”

“That is what I’m saying—if you want someone to act as your elder sister and indulge these interests of yours, then please look elsewhere. Or more precisely—” I stared hard at Her Majesty’s face. “You would hate it if I were inclined to stick so closely to you, no?”

“Yes,” Her Majesty said, grinning. “There is no point if she doesn’t disobey me. I look at people who do nothing but follow me all the time, every day!”

Which meant she wanted to have someone like that wrapped around her finger.

This is complicated... Much too complicated...

I stood wearily. “Then why don’t we cool down in a different town?”

“Indeed. There are too many people here.”

Her Majesty leisurely left the shop. I, obviously, paid the bill.



Afterward, we entered a forest we did not know the name of.

I did wonder why we had taken this route, but Her Majesty said there were beautiful flowers growing in the area, so we went.

Once we had grown tired of walking, we found a small mountain hut nearby, so we decided to rest there for a little.

Living there were two twin girls, young enough to be considered toddlers.

The older of the two was bright and cheery, and the younger one spent all her time reading books.

Their personalities were so different; were they faring all right?

“Do you not have parents? It must be rough on your own.”

“Hmm, I guess you could say we do have a mommy...,” the cheerier of the two girls answered hesitantly.

Perhaps I asked a question I shouldn't have?

“I will defeat Mother... Our mortal enemy...,” growled the bookworm.

Their home environment was much more complicated than I had thought it was...

“What are you two walking around in the forest for?”

That was a reasonable question. Only hunters ever had business out here.

“A date,” joked Her Majesty. “We’re on a date.”

I made sure I didn’t give her a reaction. “This girl is important, but she has been clinging to me for some time now. This is my day off, yet she’s assigned me to a big job.”

The girls didn’t really ask any more than that. My explanation wasn’t too detailed for the children, so it was perfect.

“I thought we should take a detour and walk somewhere quiet.”

“In that case,” the girl who was reading suddenly spoke up, “if you keep going straight for a while, you’ll find a highland. I think it’s a nice spot, but there’s a terrible, evil entity that controls everything from the shadows.”

An evil entity controlling everything? That’s an interesting thing to say to the demon king.

But Her Majesty seemed to like that. “Thank you. Then we will visit the highlands.”

We thanked the two girls, then headed off.

“It sounds rather far. How are we going to get there?”

“Pull me up and fly, Miss Beelzebub. Can you do that?”

“...I would get tired, but it’s not impossible.”

I braced myself for a future backache as I grabbed Her Majesty and flew off.



The towns and villages dotting the highlands had much cleaner air than Vanzeld Castle.

And perhaps because of the dry climate, my skin wasn’t sticky. The buildings formed neat, aesthetically pleasing rows, too.

Her Majesty did no shopping in the end and instead gleefully walked along the streets.

When we were holding hands, I often felt like I was dragging Her Majesty along with my longer strides, but she apparently didn’t find much fault with it. I didn’t understand her values.

On the other hand, she was disappointed with something else.

“There’s too little entertainment around here.”

Her Majesty sat on a low wall, her head tilted.

There weren’t a lot of people in this village, so they only had the minimum shops needed for survival.

Minstrels would never step foot in a place like this. I doubted there would be any evil entities here to begin with—only bored adventurers.

“I suppose this is how it is with a low population. The town around the castle is densely populated, and because of that, we have plenty of different kinds of shops.”

“Hmm, so our hometown is ultimately the best. I’m a little sad to think that’s the lesson we’ve learned...”

Then a crowd started gathering before us. Maybe some kind of celebrity had come by.

In the middle of the crowd was a young girl wearing a black pointed hat. But despite her age, she had a dignity, a sophistication about her that suggested she was more than she appeared.

“Ah, she’s the same type of person as us,” Her Majesty said.

The villagers were calling her “the great Witch of the Highlands.”

“I see. A long-lived witch has made this her territory. Perhaps she is our mysterious ‘evil entity.’”

A small handful of witches had gained methods for immortality and lived for a long time; this witch must have been one of them.

Some witches were not so trustworthy; calling them *evil* wasn’t entirely off the mark.

In that case, I understood why villagers who looked much older than her treated her with reverence.

The witch was selling medicine to the villagers, as her kind often

did.

There likely weren't any thick woods in the highlands, so it seemed somewhat inconvenient to specialize in making medicine, but she must have her reasons.

Finally, the villagers who were talking to the witch left.

Once there were fewer people around, the witch turned to face us. Of course she noticed two strangers in the small village, especially since we weren't wandering adventurers.

"Are you two travelers? There's nothing to see here, but it's not a bad place to stay. Feel free to relax here."

"Indeed. That is exactly what we were doing. We are of a long-lived race, so we can live a hundred human lifetimes within our own."

It wasn't *exactly* a hundred, but I just decided to give a simple answer.

"I see. I've been alive for a little over two hundred and fifty years, too. I sell medicine, but I get most of my money by killing slimes."

"You live a rather idle lifestyle if you get money from killing slimes..."

I'd never really heard of such a laid-back witch.

"My past is a little complicated. I died after working too hard, so now I'm just doing what I can at my own pace. But maybe it wouldn't be bad to go traveling around like you two once in a while." The witch approached us. "Especially you—you look so small, but you're out here traveling! Good for you. If only I had a little sister like you, I think she'd make a great addition to my laid-back life."

The witch placed her hand on Her Majesty's hood.

"Good girl."

In that moment, with incredible force, Her Majesty stepped away to put distance between them.

"Wh-what is it?!"

I looked at Her Majesty to find her expression frozen and tense, as if she had just met someone she wasn't supposed to meet.

"Is it true she is the evil entity...?" Her Majesty's attitude wasn't normal.

Yet the witch seemed entirely relaxed; she didn't seem interested in harming us.

"What's wrong? Don't tell me that touching your head is an insult or anything? I'm sorry if it was."

"No, nothing like that..."

"Oh phew. I'm glad~" The girl placed her hand in my hood to pat my head. "You have long horns, don't you? Are you a kind of beast-person?"

I could feel every hair on my body standing on end, and I immediately stepped back to create distance.

“Who *are* you...? I felt something terrible...”

This woman had strength she wasn’t fully able to hide—the kind that only high-level demons had!

I wasn’t entirely sure of the reason, but after Her Majesty’s reaction, I could tell this wasn’t trivial!

“Huh? What? I don’t have any hidden power or anything—I just make my living killing slimes! I’m just a witch who’s lived a long time!”

I couldn’t detect any dishonesty in her words, but she was powerful enough to do anything she wanted.

We could not afford to let our guard down.

“Witch, if there is nothing evil about you, then we will be leaving this village now, so don’t pursue us, all right? With that, I would like to verify you have no ill intent about you.”

“O-oh... That’s fine... I have no reason to chase you... I don’t know—something feels off here, but I won’t go after you. I get the sense my laid-back life might become a thing of the past if I get too involved with you. I try to live life avoiding trouble anyway.”

“I see. Well, that way of thinking isn’t wrong.”

Her Majesty was staring unnervingly at the witch the entire time.



Her Majesty was still frightened, but I took her by the hand and led her out of the village. Her instinctive wariness eventually disappeared.

“Are you all right, Your Majesty?”

“Yes, I’m calm now.”

Once we came to the center of the wide-open highland, Her Majesty plopped down on the grass and placed her own hand on her head.

“When she patted me, I felt so strange. I was actually shivering with terror... But my heart is still beating fast, even though the trembling is gone...”

“Oh, someone patting you on the head is unthinkable, Your Majesty. You must have been surprised by such an unfamiliar experience.”

“Hmm, I don’t think that’s quite it, but it’s hard to put into words.” She was speaking calmly, but her behavior wasn’t normal. She was typically smiling in most situations, but she was not smiling now.

At that moment, I sensed several hostile people around us. Our guards were already up after encountering that witch, but this time, we noticed a number of demons flying ahead. We called them hawk-

men or bird-people.

There were five in all.

I didn't see the witch anywhere. But although there were five of them, I didn't expect them to pose much of a threat.

"Demon King Provato Pecora Ariés! Your life is ours!"

They were holding swords and spears. I guess they had been watching us from above.

"Let me ask you, you wicked fiends, is there a witch among your ranks?!" I cried.

It was apparently an unexpected question, because one of the hawk-men wrinkled his nose. "What? No! We are only demons! We will change the current demon king's lenient policy!"

"I see, I see. That is a relief."

I promptly cast a spell, and two of the ones in front of me froze over.

By the time I was finished, Her Majesty had already buried the other three into the earth.

I didn't exactly see what had happened, but I was sure the enemy didn't, either.

"Well, that's that."

Her Majesty clapped her hands together.

"And so my strategy to lure out the assassins has been a success. ♪
Thank you, Miss Beelzebub."

"There would not have been any problem to begin with had you stayed protected inside the castle," I said, exasperated. "Even if it did mean you couldn't lure them out."

That being said, my mind was at ease. After all, in the time that I had defeated two of them, Her Majesty had taken care of three. Her Majesty wasn't so weak that she needed my protection.

"I'm sure I've told you it's terribly boring to stay inside the castle all the time. That is why I decided to go with you on your travels. We can also lure out assassins like this, so it's two birds with one stone."

"And it turns my holidays into more workdays."

Her Majesty threaded her arm through mine. "But you get to be with me. Please consider it a bonus instead."

When I saw Her Majesty smiling in high spirits, a part of me gave up—she would be toying with me a lot from here on out, wouldn't she?

"I don't think I would go so far to think of it as a bonus, but I will consider it evened out."

"Fantastic. I will allow that, then."

I had fun working as agricultural minister, but I could do with

fewer threats on my life.

"I see there are plenty of those who don't like my way of doing things, but I think it's about time we annihilate them all."

"I am not sure if that perception of them is the right approach. But the first fifty years of your rule had the most assassination attempts, with the next fifty only having a third of that, and now it is relatively peaceful."

Her Majesty stood before me and grasped my hand. "Even if you can't act as my elder sister, I would hope that you continue to support me as a political partner."

"Yes. Beelzebub is your greatest servant, Your Majesty," I replied to the one who decided my fate.



"Um, is there something on my face...?"

Laika was looking at me dubiously.

Of course she was; I was staring at her quite intensely.

"Oh, it just came back to me—I feel like I sparred with you once a long time ago. I often went to the hot springs at Mount Rokko, and I wonder if we didn't..."

"I have been training since I was little, but my memories from back then are not so clear."

Laika seemed to have trouble remembering, but little would change if she did.

"Perhaps you might learn if you ask your parents about the demon pillow-war incident. Although...I would rather leave that incident buried, actually, so on second thought, there's no need..."

I got a sound beating from the ministerial meeting after that... I shall just let it lie...

"I can't even remember what I ate three days ago~, " Vania offered.

"That is a problem," Fatla snapped back at her.

Today, I had brought my two subordinates to eat at the house in the highlands.

Azusa said we were pushing it, but holidays like these weren't all that bad. We typically worked hard, you see.

"Miss Beelzebub, thank you for buying me another book." Shalsha bowed politely to me.

Falfa followed suit. "The math book was really interesting!" she said with a smile.

"Of course, I have plenty more books at home if you want to visit. I am a high-level demon, after all. I have lots of space in my manor~"

"Hey, hey, hey! You can't just adopt my girls!" Azusa put her foot

down.

My strategy to adopt them amid the confusion never seems to succeed.

“To be honest, I suspect I may have met the two of them before you did. I feel as though I once visited a small hut in a forest.”

“You have no proof of that, and there’s nothing stopping you from making up whatever story you want. Honestly, they’re from a completely unremarkable and ordinary forest. There’s no reason to go there.”

“But fate has a way of bringing people together. Actually, I do believe our paths crossed once, as well. It might have been thirty-five years ago—no, perhaps even longer...”

“You mean we ran into each other? I don’t remember anything. Word hadn’t gotten around back then that I was strong.”

It did not seem that Azusa remembered anything.

I was much the same. I only had a faint inkling that we’d met. “I remember that I once came to Flatta, but I have traveled round the entire country, so I cannot say exactly when that was.”

“Hmm. I know you like traveling, but why would anyone come to Flatta...? Well, we’ll never know what happened in the past, so we should concentrate more on the present and the future.”

“Those clear-cut solutions are much like you.” Impressed, I took a sip of my drink.

“Yes. The future is much more important than the past,” Fatla agreed. “Personally, so long as you take your duties as agricultural minister seriously, Lady Beelzebub, I am perfectly fine with that.”

She was alluding to how I didn’t do my job properly long ago.

“But Beelzebub, you’ve had that high-and-mighty attitude ever since you were a baby, right? You were born a noble and lived your whole life with that incredible ego, didn’t you?”

I wanted to tell Azusa to let go of her assumptions, but I decided not to say anything.

“Vania, at least, has been scatterbrained since the day she was born.”

“What?! Why is that a reason to insult *me*?!” Vania protested her older sister’s surprise attack.

“Your first word was *whoops*.”

“No, that can’t be! Don’t make these things up! I’ve never heard about this!”

“I cannot verify Fatla’s story,” I said, “but Vania’s scattered brain is undeniably true.”

“Please give me a break, Boss!”

Here, as her boss, I had to help cover Fatla.

“*Sigh*, you sure are close. Especially for a boss and people working under her,” Azusa said with a hint of envy. “I wish I’d had an

understanding boss, too. That's the past, too, but I just can't help thinking about it, you know?"

"Indeed. If the boss herself has a desire to improve, her subordinates also change the way they are." Fatla glanced briefly at me. "It's all right if she's incompetent to begin with. But once she becomes aware of her shortcomings, that is when she can begin to grow and improve. Life is long, after all."

"You sure are talkative today, Fatla."

"I have no ulterior motives. I am simply speaking generally." A ghost of a smile crossed Fatla's face.

Silently and to myself, I said to her, *Thank you.*

There have been a lot of detours, and I had been bumped up to a position I never imagined I would have...

But on the whole? I'm happy.

"Oh, whoops," Vania blurted out.

"All right, Vania, tell me what it is. I'll get mad."

"Wait, aren't you supposed to say you *won't* get mad...?"

"Just say it..."

"I forgot to turn in the documents that were due yesterday..."

I stood up and gave Vania a noogie to the side of her head.

"Ow, ouch! This is workplace violence!"

"No need to worry. We are not in the workplace!"

My road ahead as the agricultural minister wasn't going to be a smooth one, it seemed...

THE END



Hello, nice to meet you. I'm Kisetzu Morita!

—But I suppose there will be a lot of you whom I'm not meeting for the first time. If you're not a first-timer, then long time no see—this is Morita.

This book, *Bottom-Tier Bureaucrat* (which is my name for it because the title is so long), is a spin-off of *I've Been Killing Slimes* (which also has a long name, so I keep it short). The original novel series, *I've Been Killing Slimes*, has ten total volumes so far released by GA Bunko, and the comic adaptation, drawn by Yusuke Shiba, has five volumes on sale from Square Enix! For those who want to know what'll happen next, you can check it out on Shousetsuka ni Narou, so please take a look!

Now then, as you may have been able to tell from the cover, this book is about the demon minister of agriculture, Beelzebub, who appears in *I've Been Killing Slimes*.

Bottom-Tier Bureaucrat was originally serialized in *GanGan GA*, and thankfully, many people read it. Not only have I been able to add a great many new chapters to her story, but we have now been able to publish an entire stand-alone novel! I truly, truly thank you all!

Among the new chapters, we have Beelzebub's parents appearing, and Beelzebub has some intimate moments with Pecora. Beelzebub's parents, especially, are a type of character that have never shown up in the original *I've Been Killing Slimes*, so they were a lot of fun to write!

There are also a great many new illustrations added by Benio, so please enjoy them all together!

Also, Volume 1 of the comic adaptation of *Bottom-Tier Bureaucrat* by Meishi Murakami will go on sale at the same time this book comes out! Please check that out, too!

Murakami has beautifully portrayed Vania's spacey moments, that look on demon king Pecora's face when she's plotting something, and other things I couldn't fully describe in words in this adaptation. I honestly recommend it!

Also, Volume 5 of the comic version of *I've Been Killing Slimes* will

be going on sale at the same time, too! Beelzebub is also on the cover of that one, so it's a whole Beelzebub party out there!

Which means three total volumes related to the *I've Been Killing Slimes* series will be coming out this month. Nothing would make me happier as the author than if the world of this series grows bigger and bigger. Just like how slimes multiply.

Well, since I have the space, I may as well talk about why I ended up writing a Beelzebub spin-off in the first place.

First, *GanGan GA*, which is serializing the comic adaptation, asked me if I would write some sort of short story for the same world. So then I decided to write a story about Beelzebub, since she is my favorite character in *I've Been Killing Slimes* (I know this started off sounding like it would be a long story, but it really wasn't).

One other reason was that Beelzebub was the only one of the main cast who lived apart from the rest of the group, so I thought it might be easier to write about her. But the biggest reason was definitely that I like Beelzebub.

Also, there are other spin-offs, like the Halkara side story, "Food for an Elf," and the Laika side story, "The Red-Dragon Academy for Girls."

For some reason (since they're short stories), both are available to read on the smartphone manga app Manga UP! Also, the Halkara side stories are included in Volumes 8 to 10 of the original series, with two chapters in each.

I hope you keep an eye out for more spin-offs!

I also hope to see you in Volume 11 of *I've Been Killing Slimes*. That will be hitting shelves in December!

Finally, my thank-yous. Thank you so much to Benio, who has done the illustrations for this and *I've Been Killing Slimes*! I am so happy we got to see new sides of not just Beelzebub but of the leviathan sisters, too!

Additionally, I want to thank all of you who have supported both the spin-off and the original series! It's because of your support that we've gotten to publish a stand-alone novel! Please keep reading the main series and the spin-offs!

An addendum:

Starting on the next page is a bonus chapter. I hope you enjoy it.

The last chapter of this spin-off novel takes place mostly in the past from the perspective of Azusa, the main character of *I've Been*

Killing Slimes, but the bonus chapter occurs in the present.

I hope to see you somewhere again soon!

The guy who orders at the only fancy ramen shop by the local station only to find it's Jiro-style,

Kisetsu Morita



My Weak Point Was Exposed



When I arrived at work, Vania was looking at something with great joy.

It was a large book. I knew Fatla was a reader, but I rarely ever saw Vania very interested in them.

At the moment, though, Fatla was staring lovingly at her little moss garden. That was unusual enough already, but there was no need for me to disparage others' hobbies.

Was Vania studying? Oh, it did not seem to be a very serious book. She was smiling too much for it to be serious.

"What in the world are you reading, Vania? —No, I suppose you are simply looking at something, hmm?"

I peeked at it from the side to see the pages filled with pictures. It appeared to be some sort of art collection.

"This is so fascinating! I suppose everyone has a history, don't they~?"

"What is it, then? Show me."

But Vania slammed the book shut. "Uh, I don't think it's a good idea for you to look, boss..."

"You worry too much! And after that reaction, I could hardly pretend I never saw it!"

"No, no, this is for your own sake! I might lie sometimes, but I'm being serious right now!" Vania insisted as she pressed the book against her chest.

She would refuse to show me, no matter what.

"I see, I see, so this is for my sake, hmm? I am happy to hear that."

"I'm really glad you understand—"

I snatched the book from her.

"Hey! You tricked me!"

"You just said that you lie, even when you are telling the truth! I can no longer trust you! I will be checking for myself!"

I doubted it would be all that horrible. Not even Vania would open a book of such serious content in this room, nor would she look at it with such glee.

I opened it, and—

—there was a portrait of me when I was a bottom-tier bureaucrat.

My expression was so pathetic. I seemed bored, perhaps because of how little pressure there was in my position. And then there were those glasses I wore back then. The image screamed *low-level civil servant*.

“Rrrgh...”

“O-ohhh... Boss is so shocked and angry that she doesn’t know how to react!”

Indeed—I had no idea how to respond to this.

“What an idiot you are, Vania. Did I not tell you to make sure that stayed hidden? I am keeping out of this.”

Fatla’s tone suggested this was all on Vania, but what she said told me that she most certainly knew something.

I flipped to another page and found several lackluster portraits of me from when I lived in the countryside.

Why was this book full to bursting with my disgrace?!

I immediately put the screws on Vania.

“Tell me where you got this. Tell me now, and I’ll go easy on you.”

“You’re scaring me, boss, you’re scaring me...!”

There was no question that this book was appalling, but it was still strange that Vania had something like this.

My answer then came from Fatla behind me. “The original came from your parents.”

“Aha! Of course, it had to be them! I cannot believe them!”

My parents had paid an artist for all these commemorative portraits.

The further I went back, the older the portraits got, and some had notes written by them like *First Day of School*.

However, I looked bored in every image... Did my past self truly live in ennui for such a long time...?

“I see the gist of it. My parents made copies of all my past portraits, put them into a book, and sent them here... The nerve!”

They must have hoped to give their daughter a nice little surprise, but I wished they could see things from my perspective.

But there was something else that angered me on a different level.

“This should have been addressed to me. You may be my secretaries, but it is not something for you to open and look at first.”

Mail addressed to the minister of agriculture directly could be a petition or a threatening letter, but there was a specific person within the ministry who was responsible for checking for that. Of course, that job fell within their normal scope of duty.

However, things addressed to me were still for me to open and

read first if they did indeed make it all the way to our office. The secretaries should not read them first—this was not a question of hierarchical relationships within the workplace. It was a moral question of opening someone else's mail without their permission.

"This is an obvious thing, Vania—can you not even do that? I am disappointed, to be honest. This will affect your assessments."

"Wait, please! Please don't tell me you're disappointed without hearing what happened first! We would never look at any mail addressed to you without permission!"

So she was going to make excuses, was she? She had better give a good reason.

"Oh? So then why were you looking at these horrid records?"

My parents had sent letters to the ministry before, so that was the only connection I could make.

But then the door clicked open.

"Greetings, everyone. ♪" The demon king walked in without knocking.

Argh!

It was the one person I did *not* want to see right now.

She would most certainly laugh at me if she saw such a dangerous item from the past! Actually—if all she did was laugh, I should count myself lucky. She would use this against me!

I immediately threw the portrait collection of my dark past into a drawer.

"Your Majesty, why have you come all the way to our ministry yourself...?"

I had to make sure she never found out, no matter what.

"Hmm~ I think it's best if you don't hear this, Miss Beelzebub~" she said with an innocent smile (and clearly malevolent intentions).

"I have no choice but to listen if you put it like that!"

"But it's about your old portraits."

"You already knew?!"

Of course she would... Someone of my caliber could not keep something like that hidden from her...

"I don't just know; *I* was the one who requested a copy of your portraits from your parents in the first place~ ♪" The demon king beamed.

And that was when all the mystery was dispelled. Vania was not lying.

Meaning Her Majesty had negotiated with my parents to obtain the book in the first place...

"You parents so kindly and willingly agreed~ ♪"

I stood frozen in place, not sure how to let off my anger...

I would have destroyed them if they were not my parents...

What have they done?!

My quick temper would only harm me, however. Right now, I had to remedy this situation.

If I did not quickly throw the portrait book in a fire, the demon king would use it for even further evil.

If she showed it to Azusa and the others at the house in the highlands, I would never recover. The image I had so carefully cultivated would crumble! I could never let that happen!

“Uh, um~ Your Majesty, it has been quite a long time since I got to indulge in my memories, so would you mind if I borrowed it for a little longer...? I’d love to reminisce next to a warm fire.”

“Of course~ Indulge away! ♪”

Yes, here was my chance. She may be the demon king, but they were still pictures of *me*. I doubt she could ask for them back right away.

“Oh, I requested ten books, since I was having them made anyway. I’m happy to give you one.”

She was one step ahead!



Things were looking bad for me, so once I was done with work that day, I went to visit the demon king.

I knew what I was going to ask.

As soon as I was admitted, I flung myself to the ground. “Please burn all the books!”

“Aww, but I was thinking about taking them to the highlands and looking at the pictures with Elder Sister Azusa and the others~” Her Majesty, sitting on one of her guest couches, was really hamming this up.

That was exactly what I was afraid of!

“No, please, anything but that... They know not how I was in the past...”

“It just means you’ve grown since your promotion. Wonderful, isn’t it? I want them to see how far you’ve come~”

“I know you are spinning it in a positive light, but what you are trying to do is expose my dark past!”

Think, Beelzebub, think!

Pleading wholeheartedly would do nothing. I had to convince her that my past didn’t matter.

“See, Your Majesty—is Azusa, the Witch of the Highlands, not your current candidate for older sister?”

Her Majesty tapped her finger on her lips, thinking for a moment before responding, “Yes, that would make her Elder Sister Azusa.”

“Then that means I have graduated from being your elder sister! You no longer need ways to toy with me anymore!”

Indeed, I no longer had to play big sister to the demon king anymore.

That was now Azusa’s job. She had taken on the very sisterly role of defeating the demon king when they fought, and she even scolded her when it was necessary.

But then an impish smile crossed Her Majesty’s face, she shot up from her chair...

...and placed one hand on my shoulder.

“Elder Sister.”

“No, I am no longer your—”

“One can have multiple elder sisters.”

So that was her angle!

“I hope you keep up your good work as my second sister, Miss Beelzebub. ♪”

I nodded weakly. “A-all right...”

I was doomed to remain in the demon king’s evil clutches in the end...

“Well, since you won’t be able to quit your role as my sister, I suppose I won’t take this book to the house in the highlands.”

My despair turned to joy.

“R-really?!”

“Yes. I would rather not betray my elder sister too much.”

That meant she would only betray me sometimes, but I would trust that everything would work out for the best.

After having tea in Her Majesty’s room, I excused myself, relieved that she would not spread word of my embarrassing past around.

She was truly a kind person deep down.

.....

.....

I stopped in my tracks.

“Wait... This means she will always have a card to threaten me with...”

Now that I thought more about it, I had solved nothing!

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